

The Rediscovery of Early Irish Christianity and Its Wisdom for Religious Education Today

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Boston College

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry

THE REDISCOVERY OF EARLY IRISH CHRISTIANITY
AND ITS WISDOM FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TODAY

a dissertation

by

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The Rediscovery of Early Irish Christianity and Its Wisdom for Religious Education Today

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Abstract

What does it mean to “be church”? How can we foster a sense of collective faith identity through religious education? What resources can we draw upon in this endeavor? I propose that the authentic early Irish Church offers insights that add to the field of religious education by suggesting that religious educators focus on forming persons in faith to be Christians both within a community of believers and in the world. Doing so not only enriches the individual, but also invigorates the Church and allows it to reclaim its voice in the twenty-first century public square.

This thesis suggests an approach to religious education rooted in the example of the early Irish tradition yet pertinent to the contemporary desire for faith, spirituality and community. The faith of the early Irish centered upon the triad of Christ the King, covenant, and community. Together these three Christian principles foster holistic lives where faith and life become inseparable, what I term abiding faith.

My approach to this task is threefold:

1. To *survey* the original texts and practices, and catechetical efforts of Early Christian Ireland (5th – 10th centuries) in an effort to recover an authentic understanding of the Early Irish Church.
2. To *place* the prominent Early Irish Christian understandings of a) Jesus Christ, b) covenantal relationship, and c) community of believers, into conversation with modern theology.
3. To *bring* the Irish recovery into conversation with the field of contemporary religious education.

Chapter 1 contextualizes the research by sketching the historical setting of pre-Christian Ireland through the arrival of Christianity with Palladius in the early fifth century. Chapter 2 continues the historical survey concentrating on the Christianization process, pedagogical practices and the subsequent transformation of Irish society. Chapter 3 turns to the content of the evangelization of Ireland first examining the Irish use of the heretics Pelagius and Theodore of Mopsuestia. I demonstrate that their influence in Ireland was primarily exegetical and that Irish use of their texts did not render the Irish Church heterodox. Secondly, I focus on the texts produced by the Irish Christians with an eye towards their christological and ecclesiological motifs. Chapter 4 engages the wisdom of the early Irish Church, their emphasis on Christ the King, covenant, and community with modern theological understandings. Here, I liberate these understandings from unnecessary tangential concepts that are detrimental to forming persons for an integrated, life-giving, abiding faith. I then take these recovered Christian foci into a conversation with contemporary religious education text.

Chapter 5 demonstrates the viability for religious education for abiding faith through the shared Christian praxis approach of Thomas Groome. I offer a description of shared Christian praxis followed by a discussion of its use in both the formal educational setting and the liturgy. Chapter 6 offers, as the title states, some concluding thoughts on the development of the work as a whole.

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To my parents

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CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE STAGE

Introduction

Ireland is an island that, throughout time, has been the setting of many heroic legends and stories that capture the imagination of the Western World. Consequently, fairies, leprechauns, and their magical lore are often the images that one associates with this small island nation. Likewise, many writers on Irish Spirituality and Religion often evoke fantastic imagery of a non-institutional, gender-egalitarian community of faith that was one with the environment and with its pagan past and in opposition to the Roman church. This chapter provides contextual insight into framework into which Christianity arrived in Ireland. I will demonstrate that, while the early Christians in Ireland may have been Pelagians fleeing the Roman Empire, the first Christian mission to Ireland (Palladius) was not only an effort to combat the Pelagian heresy but also was a papal response to the request of the Irish Christians, believers who recognized themselves as in communion with the Roman Church.

First, I provide a summary description of Early Ireland¹ geographically, historically, and culturally from which markers will emerge that, in the ensuing chapters on the early Irish Church², will be readily identifiable as native elements. This description will not be all encompassing; it will specifically highlight the areas of: 1) Social Structure, 2) Law, 3) Education, and 4) Religion. The flourishing of literacy in Ireland was concomitant with the flourishing of Christianity; therefore, the resources for the identified areas of inquiry date in some cases, several hundred years after the fact.

¹ By “Early Ireland,” I refer to Ireland in the Common Era before the arrival of Patrick, traditionally dated to 432 CE.

² Chapters 2 and 3 respectively.

Further these texts, written during the process of the Irish conversion to Christianity, exhibit Christian nuances and propagandist qualities. Despite these difficulties, “Christianized pseudohistories” (along with the wealth of other contemporaneous literary sources³ and archaeological finds) are valuable resources to reconstruct a retrospective portrait of pre-Christian Irish society.⁴

After examining pre-Christian Irish society, I secondly provide a sketch of what the “world” knew of Ireland before Christianity took a foothold there. This “outsider’s view” is helpful for two reasons: 1) It demonstrates that the Græco-Roman world not only knew of Ireland; it interacted with it. This engagement dismantles idealized visions of Ireland as a land untainted by Græco-Roman ideals,⁵ and 2) it provides a clear context for the introduction of Christianity into the “barbarian”⁶ Irish society.

³ Where once scholars of Irish history dismissed texts of the Christian era as accessible points for indigenous Irish culture, in the latter part of the twentieth century a revaluing of myths, pseudohistories, and even Christian hagiographies and martyrologies occurred such that these texts are now relevant for the examination of Pre-Christian society. Daniel A. Binchy, "A Pre-Christian Survival in Mediaeval Irish Hagiography," in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick, and David Dumville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 209. John Carey, "Native Elements in Irish Pseudohistory," in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Doris Edel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), § 1. Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005). Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, vol. 3, *Maynooth Monographs* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990). Thomás Ó Cathasaigh, "The Literature of Medieval Ireland to C.800: St. Patrick to the Vikings," in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, ed. Margaret Kelleher and Phillip O' Leary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Pádraig Ó Riain, "Pagan Example and Christian Practice: A Reconsideration," in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages* ed. Doris Edel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995). Marc Schneiders, "Pagan Past and Christian Present in Féilire Óengusso," in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Doris Edel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995).

⁴ The Christianization of Ireland was a process that took hundreds of years with pagan interests evident as late as the late seventh /early eighth centuries. In using the term “Pre-Christian,” I am referring to the period before Christianity gained a strong foothold on the island typically the period before the fifth century, CE.

⁵ Many disciplines often present the insularity of Ireland and the perceived strength of its indigenous culture as hand in hand. Examples of this sentiment in scholarly works are as recent as Snyder who writes,

While the coming of Christianity to Ireland has traditionally been associated with Patrick, the sources paint a quite different picture. While Patrick may have been the leader of the most *successful* evangelistic effort, Christianity made its way to Ireland before the arrival of Patrick and spread to such an extent that pope Celestine sent Palladius “to the Irish believers in Christ”⁷ before the arrival of Patrick. The final section will provide a context for the Palladian mission and shed some light on the person of Palladius.

This historically grounded survey examining the context for the Christian evangelization of Ireland lays a foundation for the ensuing chapters that discuss the process and content of the spread of early Irish Christianity. What follows here is not a comprehensive history of Ireland; rather I have selected specific foci to highlight within the greater subject because of their pertinence to the scope of this study. Further, I deliberately avoid entering the contemporary debates in the scholarship of Irish History where the argument on either side does not advance my purposes. By choosing to present the view of the scholarly *consensus*, I do not negate or ignore criticisms of these views but choose a route of expediency. What was life like for the early Irish? And, what can

“That area (the areas situated north of Hadrian’s Wall, including Ireland and Scotland) was only slightly touched by the Roman culture.” Graydon F. Snyder, *Irish Jesus, Roman Jesus: The Formation of Early Irish Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002), 1. Writers such as Louis Gougaud and Sophie Bryant “That Ireland was not entirely unaffected by Roman civilisation, and even by the earlier civilisation of other Mediterranean nations is undoubtedly true” also express this minimalist recognition of Roman influence. *But that influence was not such as could deeply modify the laws or customs of the people.*” Sophie Bryant, *Liberty, Order and Law under Native Irish Rule; a Study in the Book of the Ancient Laws of Ireland* (London: Harding & More, 1923), xi. Louis Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands; a History of the Churches of the Celts, Their Origin, Their Development, Influence, and Mutual Relations* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932).

⁶ see below n112.

⁷ As recorded by Prosper of Aquitaine’s *Epitoma Chronicon* s.a 431 in Theodore Mommsen, *Chronica Minora: Saec. Iv. V. Vi. Vii, Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Berolini Weidmann 1892), 473.

we know about their encounter(s) with Christianity? This chapter addresses these questions.

The Geography and Topography of Ireland

Ireland is an island northwest of continental Europe located between 51.5° and 55.5° North and 5.5° and 10.5° West. As the twelfth largest island in the world, (yet only the size of the South Carolina) Ireland measures 301.98 miles north to south and 170.87 miles east to west.⁸ Its boundaries are the North Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Irish Sea to the east, the North Channel to the northeast, and St. George's Channel to the southeast. The topography is not uniform. There are several mountainous regions on the island (mostly on the coastline) with a few peaks reaching over 3000 feet. One range, the Wicklow Mountains, is the largest mass of mountain granite in Ireland and exceeds that found in Britain.⁹ These mountainous regions are scattered throughout the island with many ending in spectacular sea cliffs including Slieve League in Co. Donegal, which, at 1972 feet above the ocean, are the highest in Europe.

The mountainous upland regions meet countless lower lying areas that contain, for the most part, large impassable bogs, "No less than one-sixth of the island is or has been covered with turf (peat)."¹⁰ The result is that Ireland has some of the most fertile farmland in the world as well as large stretches of bog land. Scattered among the

⁸ Michael Green, *Irish Geography* (The Information About Ireland Site, 2005 [cited October 30 2007]); available from www.ireland-information.com/reference.geog.

⁹ E. Estyn Evans, "The Irish - Fact or Fiction," in *The Irish World: The History and Cultural Achievements of the Irish People*, ed. Brian de Brefney (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 14.

mountainous uplands and the bog lands are sweet pastures comprised of limestone soils and, in medieval times, heavily forested areas of oaks, willows, birch, hazel, and pine.

Early Ireland was wholly rural, lacking the towns and village systems that dotted continental Europe. Further, the topography presented barriers to communication between its small tribal groups, “The juxtaposition of the upland and lowland areas, with their contrasted modes of life, has allowed different groups of people, and different cultures to coexist in a tiny island, has encouraged administrative and political fragmentation, [...]”¹¹ This fragmentation may provide an explanation for Patrick’s claim, “in Ireland, where they *never had any knowledge of God* (italics mine)”¹² despite contradictory evidence that the mission of Palladius preceded Patrick’s to Ireland.¹³

Pre-Christian Irish Society

While there is an abundance of materials from Irish archaeology and its sub-disciplines, archaeologists are just beginning to appreciate material culture as a contribution to understanding past social systems.¹⁴ In addition to material culture, I also rely on documentary evidence to formulate a schema for the manner in which pre-Christian Irish society *functioned*. However, because the pre-Christian Ireland was an orally based society, knowledge of their social mores and norms depends upon Christian Irish writers recording events and stories centuries after the fact. Despite the distance of time and the influence of Christianity, the commitment of the Irish to *senchas* (study of

¹¹ Ibid, 8.

¹² Patrick, "Confessio," in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Oliver Davies, *Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), § 41.

¹³ see Palladius p 34 ff

¹⁴ H. C. Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 102.

the past), which served as the impetus for these retrospective materials, makes it possible to piece together information culled from the texts and archaeological finds to form a sketch of early Irish society.¹⁵

Social Structure

Early Irish society was an honor-based society in which “a person’s status in society was expressed by his honor price, a translation of the Irish term *lóg n-enech* (price of face).”¹⁶ Cattle and female slaves were the currency of a person’s honor price.¹⁷ From the seemingly disparate concepts of honor, status, and cattle, early Irish society revolved.

Honor is a concept with which contemporary Western cultures struggle, viewing it as a quaint, dated, idea, out of step with the ego-centered contemporary society that focuses on person rights and privileges. In order to appreciate “honor” for the Irish requires the modern inquirer to suspend preconceptions of honor and the distaste for setting a price on the value of human beings. Honor, in its fullest understanding implies relationality, respect, and responsibility. First, as an aspect of social relationship, “Honor refers to the claim of worth, value, and respect that must be publicly acknowledged.”¹⁸ Violations to this component of honor included direct insult, satire, injury, or neglect on one’s obligations.¹⁹ For the early Irish, reparation for these abuses involved an assessment of the honor price of the person offended and the severity of the dishonorable

¹⁵ I refer you to n 3 above concerning the use of such Christianized sources and pseudohistories.

¹⁶ Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin Four Courts Press, 2000), 43.

¹⁷ Pre-Christian Ireland did not mint or use coinage.

¹⁸ Jerome H. Neyrey, *Give God the Glory: Ancient Prayer and Worship in Cultural Perspective* (Grand Rapids William B. Eerdmans 2007), 37.

¹⁹ While the Irish legal system accorded females an honor price, it was, as was common on the continent, a male-centered society. Rather than belie this fact, I have not used gender inclusive language where the predominant actors would be male.

act.²⁰ Second, honor entailed respect not only for the law that meted out punishments, but also for persons in social relationships. In Early Ireland, there was no grey area in terms of the respect due to another. The social strata system clearly established the order of societal roles with its corresponding value. Finally, honor entailed responsibility to other persons and to the community as a whole. Again, the social stratification system with its hierarchical ordering of groups specified both the persons and the degrees of obligation. These characteristics of honor for the early Irish, relationality, respect, and responsibility, provide the lens to understand early Irish society.

The early Irish laws delineate fourteen levels of rank between the highest personage, the *rí ruirech* (supreme king) and the lowest, the *mug* (male slave); each with a corresponding honor price.²¹ Within these fourteen levels, there are three basic classes of persons, aristocrat (lord), client, and slave.²² While Early Ireland was an agnatic society (related through male descent), it did not practice primogeniture in the inheritance systems of property or status. However, social status was not permanent; not even slavery or kingship. Nor was one's placement in the social schema understood ontologically. Both advancement and decline were possible with the accompanying expectation that it would take at least three generations to complete the change.²³ One

²⁰ Some acts such as wayward livestock were not an offense against one's honor but still honor price was the basis for assessment of reparations.

²¹ Fergus Kelly provides a detailed list of each rank and their corresponding honor price in his *A Guide to early Irish Law*. A male slave is the lowest rank of person (with honor price) a female slave is not a person but a unit of currency equal to three milk cows. Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), xxiii.

²² T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 68.

²³ *Ibid*, 92.

could become a slave by birth, judicial penalty, or, by force – as in a slave raid.²⁴ A king who acted dishonorably or suffered physical blemish, lost his honor price. A lord who lost his clients became a client while a client who obtained substantial livestock holdings through marriage, inheritance, or contract became a lord.

There were kings of varying degrees ranging from the king of the *túath* (people or tribe), up to the king of the province, to the (mythological) *rí ruirech* of Ireland.²⁵ Ascension to the rank of king was a process involving heredity and personal qualities. To be considered a candidate for kingship, a man must 1) have a king not further removed than his grandfather in his ancestry, 2) possess the qualities of kingship, and 3) win a political competition over other qualified candidates.²⁶

The second class, clientship, also included varying levels: free clients and base client. Both clients and lords owned land; in this manner their roles functioned similarly with both possessing the capacity to enter into a contractual agreement for clientship (often with members of the same kin group). A free client received a fief, usually in the form of cattle,²⁷ a *rath* (access to a fort), protection, and legal defense from his lord. This relationship obliged the free client to pay the lord substantial annual dues, provide military service when needed, and be a companion to the lord in the social event of

²⁴ Ibid, 68.

²⁵ The myths and sagas abound with tales of the struggles for kingship of provinces and of the high kingship attributed to Tara, Co. Meath. Byrne has written the definitive work on the subject and discounts the existence of a High King of all of Ireland before Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig in the eleventh century. F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London: Batsford, 1987).

²⁶ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 91.

²⁷ Ibid, 72. Slavery in Ireland did not contain marked differences from other Western civilizations, therefore, I have not detailed it here.

feasting. The base client received a smaller amount of cattle in the fief, protection, and legal defense from the lord. In return, the base client paid less annual dues, owed military service if needed, provided manual labor for the lord and was expected to pay a part of his honor price to the lord if insulted or injured. The free client relationship was easier to terminate (thus explaining the higher dues and standing) than the base client who was more permanently tied to his lord, just above the level of a slave.²⁸ Like kingship, obligations of clientship of either stripe did not pass by an inheritance system; at death, the surviving parties renegotiated the contract.

Each person (regardless of status) belonged to a *lanamnas* (household), the basic relational group (Fig. 1). A *lanamnas* included a couple brought together through sureties and contractual relationships into marriage,²⁹ their natural children, any “contractual children” through adoption or fosterage, and finally, their slaves and servants. The household was bound to other households into the *fine* (kin group), through the male head’s family ties.

Kin groups, (known as a *fine*), the second level of social relations, were the basis for subsequent social bonds and responsibilities. One owed loyalty to the *fine* above all else. The entire *fine* accepted responsibility for overdue payments and clientship obligations of any one of its members. Therefore, the members of the *fine* did not enter into any agreements or contracts without permission of the *fine*, nor could one sell

²⁸ Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 116-117.

²⁹ Because information on early Irish marriages is scant, I prefer to concentrate on the known—the contractual element of bonding—rather than the idea of a love match.

inherited land without *fine* permission.³⁰ In addition to the person parcels of land owned by its members, collectively, the *fine* owned common land used by all for livestock grazing.

Within the *fine*, there also were hierarchical orderings of relationships. There were the *derbfine* (certain kin) which included four generations of direct agnatic ties, and collateral *fine* which encompassed further generations or kindred through women.³¹ The *derbfine* was a carefully delineated relationship led by the male ancestor, the great-grandfather. The collateral *fine* was a more loosely recognized relationship of tangential family members. Together, the *derbfine* and collateral *fine* (because of inheritance procedures involving the distribution of land among descendents) lived alongside one another in a community of *comaithches* (neighbors). These *comaithches* included members of the kin groups, and those considered *comaithches* by proximate location.

³⁰ Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 105.

³¹ These relatives may be what the early Irish referred to as the *gens* but we cannot be certain. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 100.

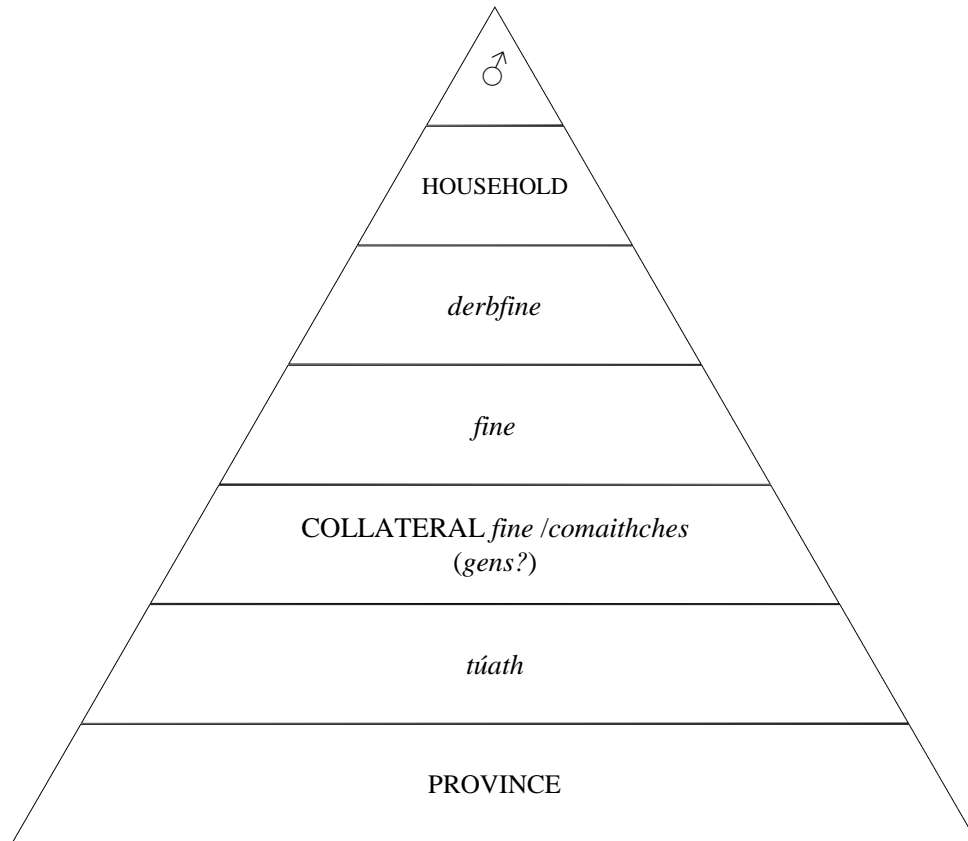


Figure 1: Irish Social Strata

The multilevel members of the *fine* and the neighbors comprised a *túath* (tribe or people). The *túath* was the “domain of public acts,”³² in which one encountered judicial decisions, calls to arms, as well as gatherings for feasts and celebrations. The *túath* was a group not only bound together by ancestry, but also by territory. Loyalty to the *túath* was a lifelong expectation; one rewarded by protection within the geographical boundaries under its control. This loyalty ran deep; should one marry someone from another *túath* and move from the ancestral lands to the *túath* of the spouse, the consequence was exile

³² Ibid, 105.

from the native *túath*. In Early Ireland, there were as many as one hundred fifty *túath* at any one time, each governed by the *rí* (king) of the *túath*.³³ Depending on the size of the *túath*, the king of one may in fact be a free client to a king of higher rank, explaining why there were differing levels of kingship in the social system.

While Early Ireland was a segmentary society³⁴ insofar that it lacked a central government or political system, it possessed an element of social cohesiveness through a common language – Irish. As Irish historian T.M. Charles-Edwards notes, “[T]herefore those whose living came from a skill with words and from knowledge – poets and storytellers – could practise [sic] their craft throughout the entire island [...]”.³⁵ This social unity allowed for the system of *túath* to function in a hierarchical manner with a network of *túath* in a geographic area under the rule of a provincial *rí*.³⁶ Traditionally these provinces, known as the Pentarchy or the Fifths of Ireland, are the areas of Ulster, Leinster, Munster, Connacht, and Mide.³⁷

³³ Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 141.

³⁴ The concept of the segmentary society evolved from Durkheim’s *société segmentaire* (Division of Labour in Society, 1893 esp 149-151) to Stephen Bühnen’s recognition that the term has “become a synonym for ‘politically uncentralized,’ and more particularly for societies with a unitary genealogy and an ‘equilibrium’ of lineages.” Stephen Bühnen, “Brothers, Chiefdoms and Empires: On Jan Jansen’s ‘the Representation of Status in Mande’,” *History in Africa* 23 (1996): 113.

³⁵ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 103.

³⁶ It is difficult to state that regnal status in all areas was of equal authority or recognition. Connacht for example lacked “a strong tradition of over-kingship.” The image in the annals, although idealistic and romanticized, does however support that at various times and in varying degrees, a provincial king was present in all areas. For a discussion of the concept of High Kingship of Ireland (of all the provinces), I refer you to Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*.

³⁷ Again, these are the traditional distribution of the provinces drawn from the word for “province” *cúige*, meaning “the fifth part.” Due to inter-provincial wars and movements of peoples (i.e. the Uí Néill) the provinces may number as few as four (with Mide subsumed by Leinster) and as many as eight (Ulster, Leinster, Connacht, Mide, Bréifne, Airgialla and the land of the Uí Néill divided into the northern Uí Néill and southern Uí Néill). Ibid, xl.

Kings and Kingship

The early texts demonstrate “almost an obsessive concern of medieval Irish writers with kingship,”³⁸ drawing attention to the importance of this role in early Irish society. Kingship was primarily a sacral role however it was not a sacerdotal one in that the king was not a high priest as well.³⁹ Irish kingship was sacred because of the social understanding of the office and personage of the king, not because of the expectation of the performance of cultic actions.⁴⁰ This numinous aspect derived from three understandings concerning kingship. He was the 1) embodiment of the people of the *túath* or province, 2) mediator between the natural and supernatural worlds, and 3) was married to the *túath* or province.

The king incarnated the collective identity of the people of the *túath* and therefore was the “face” (*enech*) of the people in all external relations. The quality of *fír flaithemon* (Ruler’s Truth) was the essence of Irish kingship and the “truth” to which it referred was no so much a judge of veracity as a compliance with the spiritual order. Because the king possessed *fír flaithemon*, his actions bore consequences for the entire *túath* (or province). A ruler who made *fír bretha* (true judgments) brought prosperity, whereas one who made *góbretha* (false judgments) brought destruction upon the people. Additionally, the king, the “fount of justice”⁴¹ who possessed *fír flaithemon*, represented

³⁸ McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, 107.

³⁹ The concept of sacral kingship, particularly as expressed in Early Ireland was not unique; it has parallels in the ancient societies of the Hittites, the Spartan Greeks, as well as some commonalities with Rome. Ibid, 108.

⁴⁰ This is not to be confused with the divine right of kings; a concept only mentioned once in the Irish literature in Adomnán’s *Vita Columbae*. Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, 62.

⁴¹ McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, 126.

the collective identity of the *túath* in relations with outsiders. Further, the temporal successes and failures of the king were the successes and failures of the entire people. For example, a battle that resulted in the death of the king meant not only defeat for the *túathi*, but its death as well.

An additional responsibility of the king was his service as mediator between the otherworld, the divine realm, and the life of the *túath*. To aid him in this role, the king's retinue included *fáith* (prophets, seers), and *druids* (those who performed the religious rituals). The *fáith* and *druids* advised the king how to navigate the many *geasa* (taboos) and *búada* (lucky things) attached to his office.⁴² By avoiding the *geasa*, he brought otherworldly protection upon his people, recognized as times of prosperity, peace, and fertility. On the other hand, plagues, famines, and other natural calamities were the result of disobedience to the *geasa*. By appeasing the otherworld, the king provided harmony between the two worlds for his people.

After his nomination and selection, the king participated in an inauguration ceremony, a *banfheis rigi* (wife-feast of kingship),⁴³ that celebrated his sacred marriage to the *túath*. This marriage brought with it a sense of the intimacy concerning the reciprocal duties and responsibilities between the king and the people. The marriage of the king to the *túath* was a relationship celebrated again at the culmination of the king's time in power from which we infer that it was a marriage recognized throughout the reign, an enduring characteristic of the relationship between king and *túath*.

⁴² "The notion of such tabus is of course, far from uncommon in the early Irish literature and in mythology, but such prohibitions were normally attached to persons, not, as here, to an office." Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1972), 46.

⁴³ Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, 63.

Although his retinue of *filid* (bards or poets), *fáith*, and *druids* surrounded the king, the understanding of the intimacy that the marriage to the *túath* bore meant that he was, in the words of Michael Maher, “never a remote figure [...]. [T]he king was always among his people as well as over them.”⁴⁴ The people understood their role in the relationship much like a clientship in which they would be responsible for dues and tithes, military support, and displays of hospitality to the king and his retinue. The king, for his part of the relationship, provided protection as a mediator with the otherworld as well as the serving as protector of his people against the ills of both the natural world and other kings.

Due to the pronounced understanding of the sacral kingship, a king had to be without blemish, should be physically beautiful, and possess qualities of high moral character such as mercy, righteousness, and honesty. In addition, he was to be conscientious, generous, steadfast, well spoken, beneficent, and above all, true judging.⁴⁵ Further, the *túath* or province could count upon the king for great displays of hospitality. The largest of these were the *óenach*, communal assemblies resembling a medieval fair, “[at] which games and contests took place, and political, social, and commercial transactions were made.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Michael Maher, “Saints and Scholars: Love of Learning in the Early Irish Church,” in *Neglected Wells: Spirituality and the Arts*, ed. Ann M. Murphy and Eoin G. Cassidy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 7.

⁴⁵ These qualities are taken from the *Audacht Morainn*, one of the earliest Irish texts composed in the seventh century as a deathbed instruction to a new king. Martin notes that despite the date of composition, “it contains nothing but pre-Christian material.” Richard P. Martin, “Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 114 (1984): 33.

⁴⁶ Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*, 50-51.

Kingship in Early Ireland, while a hereditary role, was not one of primogeniture. The selection of a king was the responsibility of the people of the *túath* or province, choosing from a pool of candidates who met the physical, emotional, and moral qualifications. This selection process was the elevation of status of one of the people. The Irish law text describes the relationship as, “[T]he king is of higher status, although they are of equal status; for it is the *túath* which ordains a king, it is not a king who ordains a *túath*.”⁴⁷

Education

Alphabetic writing⁴⁸ flourished in Ireland with the influx of Christianity. This relatively late arrival and spread of writing in Ireland may incline the contemporary scholar to declare native Irish culture illiterate. However, Michael Richter, a scholar of Irish education notes, “literacy with modern connotations as the ability to read and write cannot simply be applied to medieval societies.”⁴⁹ An oral society, Early Ireland provided access to the stories, histories, and sagas through their proclamation and memorization. Listening was an active process in which the hearer participated by memorizing and repeating the narratives. In Ireland, as with medieval literate societies on the continent, oral/aural access to history, folklore, religion, laws, and other cultural materials was a vital avenue to literacy despite the lack of written texts.

⁴⁷ Daniel A. Binchy, ed., *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 6 vols., vol. 1 (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), § 568.537-568.

⁴⁸ I am intentional here by using the term “alphabetic.” There is archaeological evidence of inscriptions on stone and metal work in Ireland from the earliest of times; however these inscriptions are believed to be artistic symbols rather than epigraphy associated with literacy.

⁴⁹ Michael Richter, “*O Quam Gravis Est Scriptura*: Early Irish Lay Society and Written Culture,” in *Irland Und Europa Im Früheren Mittelalter : Bildung Und Literatur*, ed. Prâoinsâeas Nâi Chathâin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), 27.

In Early Ireland, education was highly valued, especially concerning linguistic abilities. The king's retinue of *druids*, *filid*, and *fáith*, were persons skilled in all aspects of the use of the spoken word. These learned social classes preserved and proclaimed the historical sagas and myths, and were the guardians of traditions, history, topography, epics, pedigrees, and law. Together they provided a sense of social cohesion between the varied *túath* by administering the behavioral norms through judicial and ritual actions.

These important roles of the learned classes required rigorous preparation. The training of the *fáith* and *druids* is clothed by the fog of time; however, we are able to shed some light on the training of *filid*. To ascend from the introductory to the advanced level required twelve years of memorization of quatrains, laws, pedigrees, and sagas. In addition, studies also focused on composition as Celticist Fergal Mc Grath details, "In the last three years, in addition to the tales, the student also had to have the ability to compose a quatrain or short poem and he had to know the prerogatives and duties of the High King and provincial kings."⁵⁰ In times of conflict, the *filid*, representing the king, injured the enemy through rhetorical shame and satire. Further, the advanced *filid* traveled from *túath* to *túath* praising kings in poetry and song with the expectation that the king would repay this praise with gifts and hospitality.

The *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, a component of early Irish myths of the Ulster Cycle⁵¹ that centers upon the heroic character of CuChulainn, provides an illustration of the importance of the skills and training of rhetors. One story of the *Táin*, *The Life of*

⁵⁰ Fergal McGrath, *Education in Ancient and Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Studies Special Publications, 1979), 51.

⁵¹ A discussion of the cycles of Irish narratives follows below p 23.

CuChulainn depicts the young hero beginning his warrior education at about age six. In addition to military prowess, his education included the arts of poetry and rhetoric. This was befitting for a warrior because words served as “weapons that shock with their vigour or cleverness and thereby act to weaken their opponents’ confidence”⁵² as well as “a kind of emotional key that unlocks the potential to [a] heightened state of readiness by jolting sensibilities.”⁵³ Education in the use of words, in rhetoric and poetry was a key component to the education of not only the “learned classes” but also of warriors.

Education traversed the breath of social classes from the learned classes to the warriors and across the divide of gender.⁵⁴ Evidence of the importance and extensiveness of education can be found through a survey of the early Irish fosterage system, what Irish historian Sophie Bryant call “one of the most interesting and characteristic features of old Irish society.”⁵⁵ Fosterage, a key component of the educational system, was a legislated organization of relationships between families, bound by contract, whereby the foster parents promised to raise the child (boy or girl) according to his/her social status including providing for their education. The laws of fosterage detailed the expected fees for a boy or a girl, the clothes, food, the curriculum and acceptable manners of

⁵² Michael J. Enright, “Fires of Knowledge: A Theory of Warband Education in Medieval Ireland and Homeric Greece,” in *Irland Und Europa Im Frèuheren Mittelalter : Bildung Und Literatur*, ed. Prâoinsâeas Nâi Chathâain and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cota, 1996), 364.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Atkinson states that fosterage was “common to the education of all classes.” McCone elaborates on this universality by underscoring that fosterage was common for those of “free birth.” All sources, support that both male and females were fostered and educated. Norman Joseph Atkinson, *Irish Education: A History of Educational Institutions* (Dublin: Allan Figgis, 1969), 1. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, 203.

⁵⁵ Bryant, *Liberty, Order and Law under Native Irish Rule; a Study in the Book of the Ancient Laws of Ireland*, 37.

punishment for the foster-child. Usually this agreement stipulated the remuneration was the responsibility of the birth parents; however, if this were not possible, it was a “fosterage of love.”⁵⁶ The course of study for girls included the skills of the hearth and home, although some girls did enter the ranks of the *druids*. For boys the curriculum was more diverse: athletics, martial arts, woodcutting and kilning, chess playing, horsemanship, and “the sciences.”⁵⁷ A child of the age of six entered into the home of his/her foster-parents and remained there until the age of seventeen,⁵⁸ the age of adulthood.

In summary, the evidence demonstrates that education in pre-Christian Ireland, although lacking writing, was a carefully organized enterprise and a vital aspect of early Irish life. Despite social class or gender, the opportunity for education was available and designed to support the social order of the *túath* by training the persons tending the hearth, protecting the *túath*, preserving the traditions, and assisting the king in administering the laws. The sophistication of the system of fosterage ensured that education was integral to the activities of the community, while at the same time it provided a network of relationships that strengthened social connections in an otherwise fragmented tribal society.

⁵⁶ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 114. The *Seanchas Mar* legal tract includes uses the phrase “fosterage of affection.”

⁵⁷ “Sciences” here typically included geography, astronomy, and math. Bryant, *Liberty, Order and Law under Native Irish Rule; a Study in the Book of the Ancient Laws of Ireland*, 38ff.

⁵⁸ McCone explains that there are sources that state fosterage terminated at age fourteen however, when the same sources delineate the stages of life, there is a void between fourteen and seventeen if one accepts the earlier age as the *terminus ad quem*. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, 203-204.

Laws

A century ago, Sophie Bryant described early Irish society having,
 [H]igh ideals of honour, its neighbourly considerateness, its hospitality,
 its reserves and its dignities, its common sense, its courtesies, its high
 respect for learning, industry, and skill, its zeal for the law and for
 order in the territory.⁵⁹

Although one may categorize this statement as idealized or romanticized in some ways, in others, especially in reference to the Irish and their laws, she was accurate. There is evidence for eighty law texts in Early Ireland, extant in manuscripts from the twelfth through fourteenth centuries. While admittedly these tracts were written in the Christian era, (probably in monasteries),⁶⁰ as Irish historian Daibhi Ó Crónín notes, “there is much in the law-texts which clearly goes back a great deal further than the coming of Christianity.”⁶¹ Despite the fragmentation that such a segmentary society presents, the early Irish laws (albeit in oral form), appear to have been received, interpreted, and applied in a uniform manner across the island.⁶² Such uniformity in judicial matters was a direct corollary to the social system in which it operated.

The early Irish affinity a taxonomical approach to everything from the assignment of value of persons, to the ordering of families, to the regulation of duties and responsibilities of all the members of the social system, depended upon the legal code to

⁵⁹ Bryant, *Liberty, Order and Law under Native Irish Rule; a Study in the Book of the Ancient Laws of Ireland*, vii.

⁶⁰ Ó Crónín places the earliest texts within the sixth and seventh centuries. Dáibhí Ó Crónín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, Longman History of Ireland (London: Longman, 1995), 114.

⁶¹ Fergus Kelly, "Texts and Transmission: The Law Texts," in *Irland Und Europa Im Früheren Mittelalter: Texte Und Überlieferung*, ed. Próinséas and Michael Richter Ní Chatháin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 231.

⁶² The preponderance of the extant early Irish laws (although fragmentary in many cases), diverse in their geographic origin and encompassing several centuries of writing, display marked similarities that cannot always be attributed to the practice of the copying of manuscripts.

direct the functioning of society. Although contemporary jurisprudence delineates between civil and criminal acts, the early Irish legal corpus made no such distinction. All violations of honor and social mores were civil violations. This uniform approach meant that all punishments for offenses were violations of the honor price in which justice was served by restitution rather than retribution. This unique quality of the Irish legal renders all legal matters as civil violations. There is no criminal code, no punishment or retribution⁶³ for what modern societies term “criminal acts.”

Because all persons had an honor price corresponding to their social stratum, the aforementioned web of relationships connected individuals of varied assigned strata. Consequently, while “criminal” acts were often crimes against the social order, the proximate effect was upon a person. By making reparations to the person (in terms of honor price), who was inextricably linked to the social network, the perpetrator reconciled himself to the immediate victim and to the greater community.⁶⁴

The aggrieved party often resorted to fasting against the perpetrator to bring about justice. This brought shame upon the law-breaker and, because the tradition of fasting took place outside his dwelling, made his transgressions public.⁶⁵ If fasting proved ineffective, the victim could turn to the *rí* who made use of a system of hostages and sureties, which he exacted, from the perpetrator, which the representatives of the king

⁶³ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 114.

⁶⁴ A caveat to this general approach is in case of personal injury to another person. In this instance not only did the perpetrator have to pay the compensation of the honor price, he was obliged to undertake the duty of personally nursing the victim and providing him with medical attendance for the duration of his convalescence Ibid, 118.

⁶⁵ Fasting was not limited to equal parties; it also occurred against kings and other of higher status.

held until settlement was complete.⁶⁶ During the period of surety, the king cared for the hostages (or property taken as surety) according to their social status. In this manner, the king modeled the behavior expected of the people of the community.

The *druids* and *filid* were invaluable participants in the administration of justice. The *filid*, as the keepers of the tradition and the laws, provided the king not only with the statutes, but also with precedents from the myths and

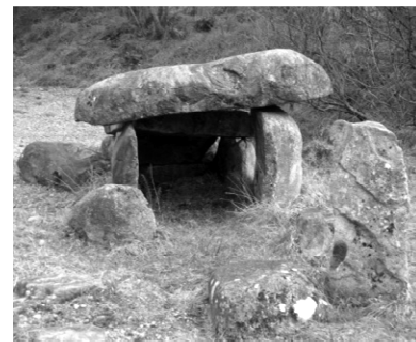


Figure 2: Portal Tomb, County Tyrone

sagas.⁶⁷ The *druids*, in addition to their religious responsibilities, acted as *brehons* (persons skilled in justice). To come to an equitable judgment, the king considered the “five paths of judgment”: truth, duty, right, propriety, and proper enquiries.⁶⁸ Together, the *filid* and the *druids* counseled the king who, in the end, relying upon *fír flaithemon* (Ruler’s Truth), passed judgment.

The legal system of the early Irish was highly regimented and sophisticated. With the precept of honor and the corresponding honor price, the people of the *túath* clearly knew the bounds of justice. In some cases, the settlement of disputes involved only the direct parties, while in others, the king and his advisers administered the law. In either event, justice was nonviolent, public, and according to the system of honor.

⁶⁶ F.J. Byrne, “Early Irish Society: 1st - 9th Century,” in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. F.X. Martin T.W. Moody, F.J. Byrne (Lanham: National Book Network, 1967), 31.

⁶⁷ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 115.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 137.

Religion

The substantial number of archaeological finds dating back to the Neolithic Age (3900-3000 BCE) attests to the presence of an active religious system in Ireland before the arrival *en force* of Christianity. The most numerous of these finds are the megaliths, many of which are still recognizable and dot the Irish countryside today. This group of structures—portal tombs (dolmens) (Fig.2), passage graves (Fig. 3), stone circles (Fig.4), and court cairns (Fig.5),—appear to have a similar purpose: honoring the dead. The presence of such a great number of Irish megaliths serving as funerary structures lends credence to the idea of reverence for the dead at a minimum, but more likely, due to their impressive size, death as a significant component in the faith of the people. Several ancient writers recount that the Celts in Gaul and Britain held a belief in eternal life and transmigration of souls⁶⁹ that, according to Celticist Douglas Hyde, “would have been curious indeed if Ireland did not share in it [this belief].”⁷⁰



Figure 3: Newgrange Passage Tomb, County Meath

⁶⁹ Timagenes *History of Gaul*, Lucan *Pharsalia*, Diodorus *Siculus*, Cæsar *Gallic Wars*, as well as Strabo, Valerius Maximus, and Pompomius Mela as listed in Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland from Earliest Times to the Present Day*, 2nd ed. (London: T.F. Unwin, 1901), 94-95.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 95.



Figure 4: Beaghmore Stone Circle Complex, County Tyrone

Decorating many of these stone giants are a variety of geometric shapes and spirals causing much speculation concerning their meaning, but because of the lack of written material from the period, must remain conjecture. In fact, other than the testament of the megaliths as to the importance of death, there is no other primary evidence of the pre-Christian belief system at all. Therefore again, reliance upon the texts written in the Christian era, primarily the Heroic Cycle literature, the Ulster, Fenian and Historical cycles becomes necessary.



Figure 5: Ballymagibbon Cairn, County Mayo

The first, the Ulster Cycle, is the “sacred aristocratic narrative”⁷¹ preserved by the *filid* that details the struggle between Ulster and Connacht in which Conchobar, Fergus, Deidre, Naoise, CuChulainn, and Queen Medb were the key players. The Fenian Cycle is “a much looser collection preserved by popular transmission”⁷² that displays an oral ballad style and are more romantic in nature. The major characters in this cycle are the Fianna,⁷³ Oisín, Diarmaid, and Grainne. The final group, the Historical Cycle, centers upon the legendary seat of royal power, Tara in Co. Meath. According to these tales, Tara featured four halls representing Leinster, Munster, Connacht, and Ulster with a great center representing the center of Ireland and serving as the seat of power for the High King. The stories focus on the deeds of Cormac Mac Airt, Eochaid, Conn of the Hundred Battles and Niall of the Nine Hostages. Many of these cycles (recorded in the seventh century) trace back linguistically to at least the third century, CE.⁷⁴

From these Irish sagas, it becomes possible to piece together an outline of the nature and role of the divinities in the pre-Christian belief system. A common quality attributed to all of the gods was metempsychosis. This was the belief that “supernatural beings could become clothed in flesh and blood, could enter into a woman and be born again, could take the different shapes, and pass through different stages of existence as

⁷¹ Christopher R. Fee and David Adams Leeming, *Gods, Heroes and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 175.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ warriors led by Fionn MacCumhail

⁷⁴ Fee and Leeming, *Gods, Heroes and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain*, 170.

fowls, animals, or men [sic].”⁷⁵ The Irish pantheon centered on the family of gods known as the *Túatha de Danaan* (People of Danu).⁷⁶ Danu, the “great mother goddess” of the *Túatha de Danaan* was associated with water—the source of all life. She was the mother of Daghdha, the “good god,” “father of all,”⁷⁷ and “divine ancestor.”⁷⁸ Early Irish art portrays Daghdha as the god of fire and the sun who carried a magic club and played a magic harp. In the sagas, Daghdha resurrected dead warriors by casting them into his cauldron of life and replenishment.⁷⁹ The children of Daghdha were numerous, but two to note are Aonghus, the “son of God,” and Briganti, (Brigit). Tangential gods to the *Túatha de Danaan* were Fionn (wisdom personified),⁸⁰ the Tripartite Goddess Macha,⁸¹ and Lug, the warrior god who was “the most worshipped Celtic divinity.”⁸²

When the Milesians invaded Ireland, the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* reports that they battled the *Túatha De Danaan* and banished them to a new home in the earth.⁸³ This story led to one of the most striking elements of native Irish religion, the belief that the entire landscape was animated; every part of the flora and fauna, every body of water, and

⁷⁵ Instances of shapeshifting fill both the “secular” sagas and early hagiographies. Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland from Earliest Times to the Present Day*.

⁷⁶ The *Túatha de Danaan* represent the fifth pseudo-historical invasion of Ancient Ireland. Considered heroes, they were understood to have divine origins in a pantheon of the same name.

⁷⁷ Fee and Leeming, *Gods, Heroes and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain*, 75.

⁷⁸ Dáithí Ó Hógáin, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland* (Cork: Collins Press, 1999), 108.

⁷⁹ Miranda J. Aldhouse Green, “Celtic Religion,” in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages* ed. Doris Edel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 137.

⁸⁰ Ó Hógáin, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland*, 118.

⁸¹ Fee and Leeming, *Gods, Heroes and Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain*, 81.

⁸² Schneiders, “Pagan Past and Christian Present in Féilire Óengusso,” 154.

⁸³ *Apostolic Constitutions* (Electronic edition) [digital book] (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1893 [cited 30 May 2008]); available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.ix.viii.v.html>. §65.

every mass of land was numinous because the *Túatha De Danaan* inhabited it.

Consequently, the view of the natural environment evolved into the belief in the *aes sídhe* a supernatural race that inhabited mounds of earth popularly called fairy forts or fairy mounds.⁸⁴

Adding to the belief that all of the created order coexisted between two worlds—the world of humans and the world of the fairies or *Túatha De Danaan*—was the preponderance of stone circles (some situated in complexes of multiple circles) that fill the Irish landscape. Many of these circles are near the “fairy mounds” and, to date, their exact purpose has yet to be determined. In some locations, the circles feature a dolmen or stone slab, which may have religious purpose, such as an altar or place of sacrifice;



**Figure 6: Beaghmore Alignment Stone and Circle
County Tyrone**

while in others, this component, is absent.

However, most of the circles contain a standing stone aligned with solstitial and equinoctial points.⁸⁵ Again, these may have religious significance, pertaining to the worship of Daghdha, or they may simply be calendric aids for a rural farming society.

(Fig. 6)

⁸⁴ Writing in 1909, A.L. Lee reported that while investigating the megaliths at Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, a local woman expressed concern about disturbing one of the stones that was inhabited by a supernatural being. A.L. Lewis, "Some Stone Circles in Ireland," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 39 (1909): 520. Although waning, this belief in Fairy mounds or fairy forts persists in Ireland today to the extent that residents will actively avoid the destruction of such sites when constructing new buildings.

⁸⁵ A trait shared with the passage tombs

Much of the pagan Irish religious beliefs remain shrouded in mystery. While the evidence for Celtic belief in general in Britain and Gaul is more plentiful, it would be simplistic to declare that all Celtic peoples, despite linguistic⁸⁶ and cultural differences, and geographic distance, were united in religious perspectives. Belief in the transmigration of souls and metempsychosis, the high regard for the care of the dead, the pantheon of Irish divinities and unique understanding of the natural order, and the possible inclusion of astronomical elements in worship, are the religious concepts that bear direct links to Ireland.

Isolated But Not Unknown

Early Ireland, as an island situated on the boundaries of the (then) known western world, was geographically isolated from the Græco-Roman Empire(s). Together with the fact that neither the Greeks nor the Romans ever conquered it leads to the erroneous assumption that Ireland was a completely insular culture, relatively untouched or unknown by the “Great Western Empires.” An examination of the classical texts of these empires reveals that not only did the empires have knowledge of Ireland and the Irish; they recorded this knowledge in a multitude of texts. Phillip Freeman has catalogued thirty-nine literary references to Ireland in the period from the mid first century BCE, until the fifth century CE, the time of Patrick.⁸⁷ These references are found in disparate sources as Hellenistic and Latin geographical texts, histories, military accounts, classical encyclopedic works, fiction, and satires.

⁸⁶ I refer to the P Celtic and Q Celtic linguistic families that are the root for such varying languages as Cornish, Gaelic, and Welsh among others.

⁸⁷ Philip Freeman, *Ireland and the Classical World*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), entire.

Rufus Festus Avienus, a fourth century CE Latin writer wrote the *Ora Maritima* drawing upon diverse early sources such as Greek and Carthaginian records from the sixth century BCE. The *Ora Maritima* is noteworthy here because it contains the earliest external (extant) reference to Ireland. In the *Ora Maritima* Avienus refers to Ireland as the “sacred isle” a description linguistically connected to “Iernē” (Ιέρνη), Ireland’s oldest Greek name,⁸⁸

*ast hinc duobus in sacram, sic insulam dixere prisci, solibus cursus rati
est. haec inter undas multam caespitem iacet, eamque late gens
Hiernorum colit. propinqua rursus insula Albionum patet.*

Ora Maritima 107-115⁸⁹

(From here, it is a two-day voyage to the sacred isle, for by this name the ancients called the island. It lies rich in turf among the waves, thickly populated by the *Hierni*. Nearby lays the island of the Albiones.)

Sea Coasts 107-115



Figure 7: The Dying Gaul

⁸⁸ Ibid, 29.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 28.

There is a gap of several centuries until the next surviving source for Ireland, Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, written in 54 BCE.⁹⁰ This text recounts the experience of Romans fighting the Celts on the Continent in the Helvetian War of 58 BCE.⁹¹ In it, Caesar includes a descriptive



**Figure 8: Ogham Stone
County Fermanagh**

reference to Ireland, "The second side of Britain faces Hispania and the west, in which direction is *Hibernia* smaller by one-half, as it is estimated than Britain."⁹² In light of the literary corpus including the *Ora Maritima* and the *Gallic Wars*, it becomes clear that Ireland was familiar to those of the Greco-Roman world as least as early as the first century BCE, if not earlier.

As a bridge between the textual and cultural evidence that provide insight into Ireland's relations with the Roman world, there is Patrick's *Confessio* written in the early mid-fifth century CE. Here is a firsthand account describing Patrick's own experience with an Irish raid into Roman Britain for slaves,

[...] *ubi ego capturam dedi. Annorum eram tunc fere sedecim. Deum uerum ignorabam, et Hyberione in captiuitate adductus sum, cum tot milia hominum.*⁹³

Confessio 1

⁹⁰ Ibid, 36-38.

⁹¹ The sculpture of *The Dying Gaul* (Fig. 7) is thought to be either a Roman depiction of a Celtic warrior met by the Romans in the Helvetian War, or a Roman copy of a Greek statue depicting a Celtic warrior from the battle between Celts and Greeks in 220 BCE. The torc around the warrior's neck is very similar to the torcs unearthed in Ireland and on display at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin.

⁹² Julius Caesar, *Gallic Wars* (Electronic) (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 54 BCE [cited October 15, 2007]; available from <http://classics.mit.edu/Caesar/gallic.6.6.html>. § 5:13.

⁹³ Patrick, "Confessio," § 1. Other evidence for a slave trade between Ireland and the Roman Empire is scant, and, Charles-Edwards refutes any possibility of this trade occurring on a large scale. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 153-154.

([...]) I was taken captive. I was at that time about sixteen years of age. I did not, indeed, know the true God; and I was taken into captivity in Ireland with many thousands of people).

The Confession 1

The *Confessio*⁹⁴ is not simply a descriptive text of Ireland or a recounting of a military encounter; it is an invaluable resource in that it provides the reader with a glimpse of Ireland through the eyes of a Roman Briton who has intimate knowledge of both worlds, Irish and Roman Briton, slave and free, believer and nonbeliever.

The fields of archaeology, paleoethnobotany, etymology, and anthropology further demonstrate the relationship between Ireland and the Roman Empire before the arrival of Patrick. Such evidentiary materials include:

- Discoveries in Lambay, a small island facing the Dublin coast – “the objects from Lambay show a decidedly foreign character, a provenance from a heavily Romanized milieu, a prevalent military destination, and a dating which is perfectly in line with the timing of a possible invasion of Ireland by Tuathal’s forces.”⁹⁵
- The presence of Latin loan words in Old Irish such as *domnach/dominicum* for the “Lord’s place,” and *cell (cille)/cello* for the building where the clergy lived.⁹⁶
- The inclusion of a Roman numeral “V” for the number 5 with the Ogham⁹⁷ numbering system represented on a bone dice found in Ballinderry, Co. Offaly and dated to not later than the second century CE.⁹⁸ (Fig. 8)

⁹⁴ I include Patrick’s *Confessio* here to illustrate its use as a source for pre-Christian Ireland. Chapters 2 and 3 will offer a detailed discussion of the work as it relates to the mission of Patrick (Ch 2) and its theology (Ch 3).

⁹⁵ Vittorio Di Martino, *Roman Ireland* (Cork: Collins, 2003), 27.

⁹⁶ Both terms evolved to refer to churches and church grounds. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 184.

⁹⁷ Ogham is a system of writing found in Ireland only from the early Christian period that uses a system of hash marks and dots to represent letters. The ogham alphabet is comprised of twenty letters and “was devised to fit the Irish language” and “was not a simple application of or a cipher for the Latin alphabet.” Ibid, 165.

⁹⁸ Di Martino, *Roman Ireland*, 81.

- The Littleton pollen records which indicate that an initial increase in cereal pollen and thus the introduction of the arable agricultural (Roman) system began as early as 150-200 CE that was fully developed by about 300 CE.⁹⁹
- The introduction of the square and rectangular shape for homes that became plentiful as early as the 6th century CE. “Building a house in a different way means changing the roots of culture. No one, (certainly not the Irish) would carry out such a change for reasons of sheer imitation.”¹⁰⁰
- Ireland practiced both inhumation and cremation in its burial practices, but with cremation, more frequent than inhumation. The presence of inhumations become more frequent after the second century CE and some have a Roman flair such as those discovered at Bray, Co. Wicklow.
- Discoveries of pottery and glass materials with Roman inscriptions or characteristics on Rathlin Island and on the coast of Dublin Bay suggest trade in goods on a modest scale.

These examples are representative (not exhaustive) of the evidence of Roman contact with Ireland. They indicate that Roman influence, while not unseating the indigenous culture, certainly became assimilated into many areas of Irish life from work to play to home life to burial practice and communication; a slow but evident acculturation process.

J.H. Andrews summarizes, “Ireland was certainly too large for a would-be conqueror to think of pacifying the whole of it by the kind of mass extirpation or deportation that might be visited upon a single tribe or town, and large enough to expose the invader to its own cultural influences.”¹⁰¹ Along these lines, Vittorio DiMartino, argues that Ireland may have indeed been “invaded” by Roman forces but that these

⁹⁹ Ibid, 62-63.

¹⁰⁰ This process would have been gradual and in order to be plentiful in the 6th century it would have meant that the introduction would have begun centuries before. Ibid, 61.

¹⁰¹ J.H. Andrews, "The Geographical Element in Irish History," in *A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, A Companion to Irish History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 3.

invasions were a process that “did not lead to permanent conquest of Ireland but was certainly more than an occasional reconnaissance or simple retaliation raid.”¹⁰² He bases his understanding of the Roman “invasions” of Ireland on three primary texts, Tacitus’ *Agricola*, Juvenal’s *Satire*, and the Irish *Annals of the Four Masters*. For DiMartino, the first two are mutually supportive and correlate to an entry in the latter that underscores its use as historical record.

Writing in 96 CE, the Roman historian Tacitus recounts the fifth campaign of *Agricola*, which occurred in 82 CE and involved Ireland,

Agricola expulsum seditione domestica unum ex regulis gentis exceperat ac specie amicitiae in occasionem retinebat. Saepe ex eo audivi legione una et modicis auxiliis debellari obtinerique Hiberniam posse;

Agricola, 24¹⁰³

(One of the petty kings of the nation, driven out by internal faction, had been received by *Agricola*, who detained him under the semblance of friendship until he could make use of him. I have often heard him say that a single legion with a few auxiliaries could conquer and occupy Ireland;)

Agricola, 24

Juvenal served in the Roman army in Britain under *Agricola*. His *Satire* written in the early second century declares that Roman armies pushed beyond Ireland’s shores.¹⁰⁴

Finally, the *Annals of the Four Masters* recounts the story of a displaced king, Tuathal

¹⁰² Di Martino, *Roman Ireland*, 34.

¹⁰³ as quoted in Freeman, *Ireland and the Classical World*, 56-57.

¹⁰⁴ Juvenal *Satire* 2.159-63 as quoted in Di Martino, *Roman Ireland*, 6. While this claim has been discounted by some as a rhetorical device, it deserves reassessment in light of the 1934 find of a Roman *olla* off the west coast of Ireland judged not later than the 2nd century CE. This find, coupled with Juvenal’s knowledge of the activities of the army in Britain under *Agricola* tends to lend more credence to the presence of the Roman army both in and beyond Ireland.

Teachtmar (Tuathal the Legitimate), who regained power in 76 CE.¹⁰⁵ Although off by six years (from the fifth campaign of Agricola), this raises the possibility that the exiled king whom Agricola befriended may in fact be the king of the *Annals of the Four Masters*. From these sources, it is evident that the Roman military was familiar with and engaged the people of Ireland, (what DiMartino would term an “invasion”) yet these encounters were not to such a degree that Rome could claim Ireland as a conquered land militarily or politically.

The remaining area for attention in this discussion of the Roman–Irish relationship is the contact between the Roman belief system and pre-Christian Ireland. In *The Gallic Wars*, (50 BCE), Caesar remarked that the Celtic religion “is all pervasive and inclusive of the gods Mercury, Mars, Apollo, and Minerva.”¹⁰⁶ Di Martino goes so far as to state, “Through war and commerce, Mars and Mercury were probably the first gods to enter the Irish pantheon.”¹⁰⁷ There is no evidence that the Irish worshipped the Roman gods, rather it is safe to state that, in the Celtic pantheon, Caesar recognized divinities with attributes so similar to the Roman pantheon that he mistakenly assumed they were the same.

In addition, there is a pre-Christian Roman inscription at Station Island, Lough Derg, Co. Donegal. As the *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* describes it, “The legible part of the inscription is thus ORNECNVS ET ELISA SOMNIVM...which

¹⁰⁵ William H. Brownlee, "Exorcising the Souls from Ezekiel 13:17-23 " *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69, no. 4 (1950). M76, 106.1

¹⁰⁶ Caesar, *Gallic Wars*.

¹⁰⁷ Di Martino, *Roman Ireland*, 138.

suggests that the two persons named visited the island at some pre-Christian stage in its history for the purpose of obtaining an oracular vision.”¹⁰⁸ This inscription supports an understanding of a Roman presence in Ireland to the extent that a specific site bore such a reputation for visions or oracles that it attracted pilgrims to Ireland from the Empire.

The Græco-Roman world, at least as early as the fourth century BCE, was aware of Ireland. The textual, cultural, and archaeological evidence demonstrate that there were several venues of contact including trade, military incursions, and religious pilgrimages. The result of these encounters was not one of conquest and domination; rather it was a slowly developing relationship between the influences of the Roman Empire and native Irish culture.

Christianity and Early Ireland

The Church and Ireland before Palladius

It is not a stretch of the imagination to assert that as Romans converted to Christianity, these Christians would have introduced their new religion to Ireland through war, pilgrimage, and possibly trade. The reference to an area “inaccessible to the Romans” by the great Latin theologian, Tertullian (155/160 – 245 CE) supports Irish historian, Dáibhi Ó Cróinín’s assertion that Christianity spread from the continent to Britain, “by the beginning of the third century,”¹⁰⁹ a claim supported by Tertullian,

In quem enim alium universae gentes crediderunt nisi in Christum qui iam venit? Cui etenim crediderunt gentes, [...] Romani et incolae, tunc et in Hierusalem Iudaei et ceterae gentes, ut iam Gaetulorum varietates [...] et Galliarum diversae nationes et Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca Christo

¹⁰⁸ Robert Alexander Stewart MacAlister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* (Dublin,: Stationery Office, 1945), 302.

¹⁰⁹ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 16.

vero subdita [...] et abditarum multarum gentium et provinciarum et insularum multarum nobis ignotarum et quae enumerare minus possumus ?

Adversus Iudaeos 7:4¹¹⁰

(For upon whom else have the universal nations believed, but upon the Christ who is already come? For whom have the nations believed [...], Romans and sojourners, yes, and in Jerusalem Jews, and all other nations; as, for instance, by this time, the varied races of the Gaetulians, [...] and the diverse nations of the Gauls, and the haunts of the Britons--inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ, [...], and of many remote nations, and of provinces and islands many, to us unknown, and which we can scarce enumerate?)

Against the Jews 7:4

Rome viewed Ireland as an extension of British responsibility,¹¹¹ a perspective demonstrated by St. Jerome's letter to Ctesiphon (415 CE) which states that, "even Britain, the province fertile in the breeding of tyrants and the Irish peoples, and all the barbarian nations 'round the very ocean have come to know Moses and the prophets."¹¹² These two references by Fathers of the Church, (Tertullian and Jerome) display not only an awareness but also a concern of the Church with Ireland that predates both Patrick and Palladius.

The Palladian Mission

Charles-Edwards identifies three concerns that the early papacy faced concerning Ireland, 1) a pastoral response to the Irish Christians, 2) the spread of Pelagianism, and

¹¹⁰ Tertullian, "Adversus Iudaeos." In *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Latin Christianity*, ed Phillip Schaff. (Place Published), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.iv.ix.vii.html> (accessed October 10, 2007).

¹¹¹ Liam de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 82.

¹¹² Jerome, "Epistula Ad Ctesiphon," in *Nicene Post Nicene Fathers* ed. Phillip Schaff (New York: Christian Publishing Co., 1892), ¶ 9.

3) primatial authority.¹¹³ By ordaining Palladius as the first bishop of the Irish in 431,¹¹⁴ Pope Celestine addressed all three concerns. This appointment, according to Celestine's own words, could only occur as a response to a request from the Irish Christian community, "*Nullus invitatus detur episcopus, Cleri, plebis et ordinis consensus desiderium requirantur.*"¹¹⁵ (No Bishop may be furnished against the will. [Upon] an agreement of the desire of the clergy, people and orders, [a bishop] may be requested.)¹¹⁶ In the ordination of Palladius as bishop to the Irish, Celestine fulfilled his role as the shepherd of the Church, tending to the existing Irish flock.

In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the Roman Empire was in its last throes. Theodosius divided the empire into East and West in 395 CE with the latter's capital set in Milan. In 402 CE, the Western Empire again moved its capital, this time to Ravenna. In 410 CE, the Visigoths attacked Rome and, in an effort to consolidate its military, Roman forces withdrew from Britain, effectively removing Britain from the authority of the Roman Emperor. Therefore, in 418 CE when the Emperor Honorius enacted a secular law that exiled anyone who espoused Pelagianism,¹¹⁷ Britain became a suitable refuge.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ See T.M. Charles-Edwards, "Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: Mission and Primatial Authority," in *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993*, ed. D. N. Dumville, *Studies in Celtic History* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1993). And Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 202-214.

¹¹⁴ see p. 3 above.

¹¹⁵ Celestine, *Epistle IV* PL 50 col 434 as quoted in Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 205.

¹¹⁶ It is interesting that Celestine presumed consultation with a local church before appointing a bishop; an ecclesial paradigm that recognizes the authority of the pope while equally recognizing the legitimacy participation of the local community of faith in the decision-making process!

¹¹⁷ J. P. Migne. "Patrologia Latina ". (Place Published: ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 1996), www.pld.chadwyk.com (accessed October 30, 2007). vol 56.

¹¹⁸ possibly chosen because Pelagius himself was a Roman Briton.

Prosper, an historian, contemporary of Germanus and Palladius, strong opponent of Pelagianism, and as one who was in Rome during the papacies of Celestine and Leo, is a reliable source for the spread of Pelagianism in Britain and the connection to Ireland. He records in the *Chronicon* for the year 429 CE, that Pope Celestine, under the advisement of the then-deacon Palladius, dispatched Germanus, bishop of Auxerre, to Britain to combat the Pelagian heresy.¹¹⁹ He elaborates on the event further in the *Contra Collatorem*, written in defense of Pope Celestine against his primary detractor, John Cassian,

*Nec vero segniore cura ab hoc eodem morbo Britannias liberavit,
quando quosdam inimicos gratiae solum suae originis occupantes
etiam ab illo secreto exclusit oceani et, ordinato Scottis episcopo dum
Romanum insulam studet seruare catholicam, fecit etiam barbaram
christianam.*

Contra Collatorem 21¹²⁰

(He [Celestine] has been no less energetic in freeing the British provinces from this same disease [Pelagianism]; he removed from that hiding place certain enemies of grace who had occupied the land of their origin; also, having ordained a bishop for the Irish, while he labours [sic] to keep the Roman island catholic, he has also made the barbarian island Christian.)

Against the Conferences, 21

¹¹⁹ Prosper. "Epitoma Chronicon in Monumenta Germaniae Historica : Chronica Minora : Saec. Iv. V. Vi. Vii." (Place Published: Weidmann, 1892), <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn=urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00000798-7> (accessed October 30, 2007). *sa* 429. Constantius of Lyons, biographer of Germanus, describes the circumstances of the dispatch of Germanus to Britain, "About this time a deputation from Britain came to tell the bishops of Gaul that the heresy of Pelagius had taken hold of the people over a great part of the country and help ought to be brought to the Catholic faith as soon as possible. A large number of bishops gathered in synod to consider the matter and all turned for help to the two who in everybody's judgment were the leading lights of religion, namely Germanus and Lupus, apostolic priests who through their merits were citizens of heaven, though their bodies were on earth. And because the task seemed laborious, these heroes of piety were all the more ready to undertake it; and the stimulus of their faith brought the business of the synod to a speedy end." Constantius de Lyons, *Vie De Saint Germain D'auxerre*, ed. René Boriis, trans. René Boriis, vol. 112, *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965), Ch 12.

¹²⁰ in Migne. "Patrologia Latina ". (Place Published (accessed. vol 100.

The Christian community in Britain, as well as its responsibility, Ireland, required episcopal guidance to protect it from the pervasiveness of the Pelagian heresy. Not only did the Pelagians simply find a safe haven out of reach of imperial threats, the heresy gained a worrisome foothold.¹²¹ These events culminated in 431 with Celestine's commissioning of Palladius to Ireland, "*Ad Scottos in Christum credentes ordinatus a papa Celestino Palladius primus iscopus mittitur*" (Palladius, having been ordained by Pope Celestine, is sent as their first bishop, to the Irish who believe in Christ").¹²²

Who was Palladius, and, what can we know of his efforts in Ireland? This question has been a quagmire of Irish ecclesial history. Apart from Prosper, we have scant definitive information about him. To complicate matters, the veil of time and propaganda obscure his identity. The most recent work on Palladius, "Who was Palladius, 'First Bishop of the Irish'?" by Dáibhí Ó Crónín¹²³ offers a compelling argument that places Palladius in both Auxerre and Rome. In brief, Ó Crónín posits that the Palladius of the poem *De reditu suo* (*On His Return*) written 13 October 417 CE by Claudius Rutilius Namatianus is, in fact, the Palladius of the Irish. *De reditu suo*, when read in conjunction with the Caspari corpus of Pelagian writings,¹²⁴ provides a timeline

¹²¹ The settlement of Pelagianism in Ireland could not happen in isolation, there must have been Christians there with whom the Pelagians settled and, to the disappointment of Rome, grew in number and attention.

¹²² Prosper. "Epitoma Chronicon in Monumenta Germaniae Historica : Chronica Minora : Saec. Iv. V. Vi. Vii." (Place Published (accessed. In introduce Palladius here to demonstrate the presence of Christianity in Ireland before the arrival of Patrick. This presence I attribute to the encounter between the Irish and Roman cultures. A more detailed discussion of the Palladian mission follows below.

¹²³ Dáibhí Ó Crónín, "Who Was Palladius 'First Bishop of the Irish'?", *Peritia* 14 (2000).

¹²⁴ as found in C. P. Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen Und Predigten Aus Den Zwei Letzten Jahrhunderten Des Kirchlichen Alterthums Und Dem Anfang Des Mittelalters : Theils Zum Ersten, Theils Zum Zweiten Male Hrsg. Und Mit Anmerkungen Und Abhandlungen Begleitet* (Christiania Mallingsche Buchdruckerei, 1890). Ó Crónín includes a translation of relevant sections Ó Crónín, "Who Was Palladius?," 225-229.

for a young man named Palladius who has connections to Rome, Auxerre and, therefore, Germanus, and Pelagianism. This man was born 375 CE, the son of a Roman aristocrat, the Christian Exuperantius¹²⁵ in Poitiers. He was educated in Gaul (Auxerre?), went to Rome to study law whereupon he travelled to the Armoricas to teach.¹²⁶ He married and his wife gave birth to a daughter. After serving in the military, he had a religious experience and, under Pelagian influences, renounced his station in life. At some point after the sack of Rome in 410, he underwent another conversion, this time renouncing Pelagianism as a heresy. In time, his Pelagian connections became a distant memory. He was welcomed into the clergy first as a deacon, and later (as was common for many Gallican aristocrats), ordained a bishop.

Ó Crónín admits that this is only a theory; however, his substantial textual and historical research strongly undergirds his theory. If correct, the Palladius of Ó Crónín would be familiar with Germanus both by social position in Gaul, and by his family's Christian faith. Due to his connection to Germanus and his familiarity with Pelagianism, he may have accompanied Germanus to Britain to combat the heretics, afterwards reporting to Rome the activities in Britain. This report would garner him papal attention, so that when the need arose for a bishop for Ireland, a responsibility of the British Church with close ties to Pelagianism, Palladius was a suitable candidate. In sending Palladius,

¹²⁵ Ó Crónín, "Who Was Palladius?," 215. See also Jerome, "Epistula Exuperantius," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Phillip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company).

¹²⁶ Claudius Rutilius Namatianus. "De Reditu Suo." In *Iter Gallicum*. (Place Published, 417), <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/rutilius.html> (accessed October 15, 2007).

Celestine knew that he was able to be effective among any possible Pelagian remnants in Ireland and that the community would welcome him.

In addition to the *De reditu suo*, the accounts of Propser, and the Pelagian corpus, there are a few indicators of the Palladian mission in Ireland. First is Cummian's *De controversis Paschali* which offers an inference to Patrick in the reference to the three methods of reckoning the date of Easter including the *Easter Table of Patrick*. However, as Ó Cróinín highlights, the attribution to Patrick is in error and this table probably dates to the Palladian mission.¹²⁷ Second, the memory of Palladius survives in a ninth century marginal poem by Sedulius Scottus in which he writes,

*O magnum Scotiae misit Pictonia diues
Munus relliquias, quas uelit esse suas.*¹²⁸

(O great was the present that the rich Poitiers sent to Ireland:
a wealth of relics that it wishes for itself.)

Ó Cróinín states that this line “is a precious memory of the founder of Irish christianity [sic] and of his place of origin”¹²⁹ (Palladius in Poitiers). Third, we have traces of the Palladian mission in the place names surrounding Clonard, one of the early great monasteries in the central province of Mide,¹³⁰ and according to the ninth century *Bethu Phátraic*, in Wicklow.¹³¹ Finally, although the name Palladius was not an uncommon

¹²⁷ Patrick, as a Briton would have followed the 84-year cycle rather than the 19-year cycle used in Rome with which Palladius would have been familiar. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Irish History and Chronology* (Dublin Four Courts Press, 2003), 29-30.

¹²⁸ cited in Ó Cróinín, "Who Was Palladius?," 235-236.

¹²⁹ Ibid: 236.

¹³⁰ Ibid: 237.

¹³¹ Cell Fine, Tech na Románach, and Domnach Airthe are also associated with Palladius, “And Palladius baptized a few there, and founded three churches—viz., Cill-fine (in which he left his books, and the casket with the relics of Paul and Peter, and the tablet in which he used to write), and Tech-na-Roman, and Doinhnach-Airte, in which Silvester and Solonius are.” *Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick* (electronic book)

one, the record of a Gallican bishop named Palladius attending the Synod of May in 451 held as response to Leo's *Tome*, suggests an identification with the Palladius of the Irish mission, as one who was associated with Gaul and Leo, and as well as serving as a bishop himself.

The mission to the Irish also addressed the third papal concern, primatial authority. During the papacy of Leo the Great, the Roman Empire continued to decline; giving rise to the fear that Christian faith would meet a similar fate. However, if Christianity extended beyond the limits of the Empire, to places such as the “barbarian”¹³² island of Ireland, faith would not be inextricably linked with the success or failure of Rome. In a homily preached on the feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, Leo proclaimed that where a human empire failed, the empire of God succeeded,

These men [Peter and Paul] are the ones who promoted you [Rome] to such glory that, as a holy race, a chosen people, a priestly and royal city, and having been made the head of the whole world through the holy see of the blessed Peter, you came to rule over a wider territory through the worship of God than by earthly domination.¹³³

Sermon LXXXII

For Leo, Rome owed its success to the apostles and the Christian faith rather than the Church in some way being indebted to the Empire. This extension of Christianity to Ireland fulfilled the gospel imperative, “Go and preach to all nations” (MT 28:19) as well as an immediate, doctrinal one, the repression of the Pelagian heresy.

[eBook] (Project Gutenberg, 1880 [cited 12 January 2008]); available from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18482/18482-h/18482-h.htm#chap6025>.

¹³² as Prosper referred to Ireland n 111.

¹³³ Leo, *Sermon Lxxxii on the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul* (Electronic Edition) (T&T Clark, [cited October 15, 2007 2007]); available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf212.ii.v.xlii.html>.

“For at least twenty years, Palladius’ mission remained of deep concern for both Leo and Prosper”¹³⁴ as well as to Leo’s predecessor, Celestine. Unfortunately, later hagiographers synthesized the missions of Palladius and his successor in Ireland, Patrick,¹³⁵ with Patrick’s legacy eclipsing the importance of the Palladian mission. Muirchú, a seventh century biographer of Patrick, mentions Palladius’ mission as brief and places his death in Britain.¹³⁶ Tiérchán, writing after Muirchú, conflates the two stating that Palladius and Patrick were one in the same because Patrick was also a name for Palladius.¹³⁷ However, hagiography served several purposes; 1) education in faith, 2) support for a saint in a time of warring churches and monasteries for primacy, and 3) to extol the supremacy of Christianity over paganism. Therefore, the neglect of the Palladian mission and the conflation of Palladius with Patrick in the hagiographical materials were most likely propagandistic tools written to meet contemporary needs rather than a denial of historical accounts.

Through the various interactions with the Empire, Christianity spread beyond the Continent and came ashore in Ireland. The decline of the Empire and the spread of Pelagianism threatened the stability of Christianity in the West. By ordaining Palladius a bishop and dispatching him to Ireland, the Roman Church did not simply respond to the request of the fledgling Irish Christian community, it countered the threat of Pelagian

¹³⁴ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 212.

¹³⁵ Ó Cróinín, "Who Was Palladius?."

¹³⁶ Muirchu, "Vita Patricii " in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Oliver Davies and Thomas O' Loughlin, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).§7.

¹³⁷ "Notulae of Tirechán from the Book of Armagh 807 Ce," in *St. Patrick's World*, ed. Liam De Paor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996; reprint,), 203.

heresy while at the same time serving the ideal of primatial authority. Over time, as the next chapter demonstrates, the mission of Patrick, who shortly followed Palladius, overshadowed not only the efforts of Palladius, but also the Christian presence in Ireland itself before the (traditional) arrival of Patrick in 432 CE.

Conclusion

The life of the people of Ireland, before the influx and flourishing of Christianity in the early fifth century, presents itself to the contemporary researcher as paradox in all its glory. This chapter delved into areas such as, “What was life like for the early Irish, and what can we know about their encounter(s) with Christianity?” The first part of the question I situated into a framework (albeit retrospective) of the social schema, encompassing the value and status of persons, the societal relationships, systems of jurisprudence, education, and religious beliefs, and finally in the relations with the Græco-Roman West. Armed with this background, I outlined the onset of the introduction of Christianity to Ireland before the arrival of its patron saint, Patrick. The stage has thus been set for an examination of the spread of Christianity in this paradoxical, puzzling, setting of early Christian Ireland.

CHAPTER 2: THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF IRELAND

Introduction

In the period of the Late Roman Empire (284-476CE), as Christianity spread westward from Palestine across Africa and Asia Minor, to Europe and Britain, it made its way across the Irish Sea to Ireland as well. Ireland remained, in the oft-quoted description by Daniel Binchy, a “tribal, rural, hierarchical, and familiar”¹ society, that was largely pagan, orally based, and independent of the political or religious influences of Rome. However, within a few centuries, a transformation occurred whereby Ireland became a nation in which Christianity flourished, replete with thriving monastic towns and international acclaim for its educational system, spirituality, and literature. This was not the result of a hostile invasion and domination by external forces; it was the product of the inculturation² of the Christian faith story and vision with Irish social structures and mores.

This chapter examines the processes of the evangelization of Ireland from the mission of Patrick to the evolution of an extensive network of church settlements and monastic communities. Here I focus upon the development of faith communities, churches, and monasteries by presenting the interaction of Christian faith with the native Irish social, legal, and educational systems. This examination demonstrates the comprehensiveness of the societal changes wrought by the contact between insular Irish

¹ Daniel A. Binchy, "Secular Institutions," in *Early Irish Society: "These Lectures Were Planned by the Council of Radio Éireann to Inaugurate the Series of Thomas Davis Lectures."* ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin: Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland, 1954), 54.

² Drawing upon Anscar Chupungco I use the term *inculturation* to include “mutual interaction” as opposed to *enculturation* which connotes an “insertion into a culture” or *acculturation* which implies “the juxtaposition of two cultures”. Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 25-28.

culture and Christianity. This provides the context for chapter 3, where I introduce the content and products³ of the Christianization of Ireland. Together these two chapters provide insight into the religious experience that was early Irish Christianity.

The New Faith Takes A Foothold

Medievalist Michael Richter writes “[T]he Christianity that came to Ireland [...] came in a Roman Catholic form.”⁴ Even Propser’s fifth century references to the spread of Pelagianism place the heresy in Britain, not in Ireland,⁵ thus lending support to Richter’s claim of an orthodox Christianity in Ireland. However, the Christian faith that arrived and later spread across Ireland was open to inculturation, a process by which Irish society and Christianity transformed one another. This exchange informed the understanding of Christianity not only in Ireland but also in Britain, and Europe;⁶ yet, it did not yield a heterodox form of Christianity. Throughout its pre-Norman period, the Irish Christian community understood its relationship with Rome as integral to its faith identity to the point that credited Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland with saying, “The church of the Irish, which is indeed the church of the Romans.”⁷

³ Chapter 3 below includes a survey of the literature of evangelization.

⁴ Michael Richter, "Models of Conversion in the Early Middle Ages," in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Doris Edel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 124.

⁵ See chapter 1 above.

⁶ Chapter 3 addresses the understanding of the particularity of Irish Christian theology. The impact of such a theological understanding upon the Roman Church is beyond the scope of this study.

⁷ Gerard MacGinty, "The Irish Pentateuch of the Reference Bible: The Problem Concerning Its Sources," in *The Scriptures and Early Medieval Ireland: Proceedings of the 1993 Conference of the Society for Hiberno-Latin Studies on Early Irish Exegesis and Homilectics*, ed. Thomas O' Loughlin, *Instrumenta Patristica Et Mediaevalia* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1999), 90. §3.

The preceding chapter ended with a discussion of the identity of Palladius and his mission in Ireland. While time obscures much of Palladius' work in Ireland and its effect on the flourishing of Christianity there, the opposite is true for his successor, Patrick. The Patrician materials⁸ are broad in scope, ranging from letters, to laws, to legends. Patrick, not Palladius receives the credit for the conversion of Ireland,

These wild and vicious people would not easily accept his teaching, and Palladius did not want to spend long in a land not his own. So he decided to return to Pope Celestine. (§7) [...] With the advent of Patrick came the destruction of the cult of idols, and everything was filled with the universal faith of Christ. (§9)⁹

Muirchú Vita S. Patricii

Muirchú's focus and sentiment highlights the importance of understanding the most successful Christian evangelistic effort in Ireland, that of Patrick as a precursor for the examination of the early Irish Church.

*The Mission of Patrick*¹⁰

In the two works by Patrick's hand, the *Confessio* and the *Epistola ad Croticus*, he demonstrates not a simple or cursory familiarity with scripture (as has long been assumed), but an advanced level of biblical literacy to the degree that Patrick's voice is

⁸ By "Patrician" I do not refer only to the works of Patrick himself, but more broadly to work by (both genuine and attributed to) and about Patrick. I confine my examination to the two earliest *Vitae*, those of Muirchú and Tírechán which were written in the period of investigation. Muirchu, "Vita Patricii," in *Saint Patrick's World*, ed. Liam De Paor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996). Muirchu, "Vita Patricii ". Tírechán, "Bishop Tírechán's Account of St. Patrick's Journey," in *Saint Patrick's World*, ed. Liam De Paor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996).

⁹ Muirchu, "Vita Patricii ".

¹⁰ In the sixteen centuries between the composition of *The Confessio*¹⁰ and the present day, many have attempted to answer questions concerning Patrick's life, mission, and influences on Christianity throughout Ireland, about which Patrick is either unclear or silent. This study will not be an exposition of these grey areas in Patrician studies, rather my goal here is to offer a sketch of the missionary work of Patrick in Ireland that serves as a cornerstone for the examination of early Irish theology in the subsequent chapters of this study.

easily interspersed with numerous scriptural quotes and inferences.¹¹ The result is a wonderfully fluid text that evokes an image of a man whose relationship with God is intimate and experiential, and whose spirituality was an embodied one expressed through his pastoral ministry.¹²

“*Ego Patricius, peccator rusticissimus et minimus omnium fidelium et contemptibilis sum apud plurimos [...].*” (I am Patrick, a most simple sinner and least of all the faithful, and [held] the most contemptible by many [...]).¹³ So begins one of the earliest extant texts introducing Patrick, patron saint and apostle of Ireland. The *Confessio* is a retrospect of his mission in Ireland and a defense against charges of moral and intellectual ineptitude and misuse of church funds. Here Patrick introduces himself not as a bishop, not as a great leader, not as a person with exemplary credentials, but rather as a simple man and a sinner.¹⁴ A Romano-Briton from Bannavem Taburniae,¹⁵ the son of a deacon, and grandson of a priest, Patrick fell into the hands of Irish slavers who took him to Ireland at the age of sixteen (*Conf.* 1). He spent six years in slavery in Ireland

¹¹ The work of David Howlett and Michael Herren have been key in uncovering the biblical skill and use of Latin rhetoric in the writings of Patrick. Heretofore, readers took Patrick’s claim of simplicity as a literal description rather than a literary device.

¹² I discuss the theology of Patrick as expressed in his own words in the *Confessio* and *Epistola ad Croticus* below in chapter 3.

¹³ Patricus, *Confessio* (Latin) (University College, Cork, 461 CE [cited 12 Jan 2007]); available from <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/L201060/index.html>.

¹⁴ This mirrors the introduction in the only other extant work by Patrick, *Epistula ad Croticus*, “Patricius peccator indoctus.” For centuries scholars understood these claims literally; that Patrick was truly unlearned however thanks to David Howlett’s extensive textual analysis, they are now generally accepted as a clever rhetorical devices. Further, in acknowledging his sinfulness, Patrick follows the Pauline model especially 1 Tim 1:15-16 wherein the salvation of even the most grievous sinner is testimony to the mercy and omnipotence of Christ.

¹⁵ A place that, to date, has not been identified.

tending sheep¹⁶ before his escape and return to his family in Britain (*Conf.* 17 -23). His liberation was not easy; he recounts that God freed him not only from slavery but also from “twelve dangers which threatened my life as well as from many snares and from things which I am unable to express in words” (*Conf.* 35). After his liberation from slavery and survival of the perilous journey out of Ireland, Patrick returned to his family in Britain.

However, despite the ecclesial positions of his family, Patrick does not credit his upbringing as the grounds for his Christian faith, rather it was his time spent in slavery

when “God bestowed many blessings and graces” (*Conf.* 3) that nourished his growth in faith. His devotion continued to grow. In time, he was ordained to the diaconate (*Conf.* 27) and, eventually elevated to the role of bishop (*Conf.* 32).

432	Patrick reached Ireland in the ninth year of Theodosius Minor
441	Patrick the bishop was approved in the Catholic faith.
443	Patrick the bishop was flourishing in our province in the fervour [sic] of faith and teachings of Christ.
457	The repose of Old Patrick as some books tell.
461	Here some place the death of Patrick
492	The Irish say that Patrick the archbishop died
493	Patrick, arch-apostle of the Irish rested on the 17 th of March, in his sixtieth year since he had come to Ireland to baptize the Irish.
553	So I have found in Cuanu’s book: Patrick’s relics were put by Colum Cille in a shrine, sixty years after his death.

Figure 9: *Annals of Ulster* entries pertaining to Patrick

Later, according to Patrick, an angel named Victoricus appeared to him with a letter containing the “voice” of the Irish, “as if they were shouting with one voice, ‘O

¹⁶ Possible sites for this captivity are Slemish in Co. Antrim and Croagh Patrick in Co. Mayo.

holy boy we beg you to come again and walk among us”(Conf. 23). Patrick returned to Ireland, the land of his captivity, as a bishop to educate, evangelize, and baptize. The Ireland that he encountered was an island in turmoil; alliances formed between *túath* to plunder an unprotected Britain left vulnerable due to the withdrawal of Roman forces. When the British spoils diminished, these alliances turned their attention towards new prospects for pillage—neighbors on Irish soil. The traditional Pentarchy was shattering as the Uí Néill dynasty, at war with the Uliad kings, expanded their territory southeastward into Leinster.¹⁷

According to Celticist Ludwig Bieler, throughout the *Confessio* Patrick “gives the impression that on his arrival he found the Irish aristocracy almost entirely pagan. It would seem, therefore, that in Ireland, as in all parts of the Roman Empire, Christianity made its first converts among the lower classes.”¹⁸ Among those included in this first round of conversions by Patrick were women, including noblewomen, the daughters of kings, and Irish society’s lowest persons, female slaves,

But of all these women, those held in slavery have to work the hardest [to live the Christian life]: They are continually harassed and even have to suffer being terrorized. But the Lord gives grace to many of his maidservants, and the more they are forbidden to imitate the Lord, the more they boldly do this. (Conf 42)

Patrick was “especially concerned”¹⁹ with the spiritual welfare of those at the lower level of the social stratum (including women) who may have been the most affected and most vulnerable to the effects of societal rupture caused by the inter-Irish warfare.

¹⁷ de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*, 31.

¹⁸ Ludwig Bieler, "Christianization of Insular Celts During the Sub-Roman Period," *Celtica* 8 (1968): 114.

¹⁹ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 29.

The dates for his missionary activity in Ireland are disparate (Figure 9).²⁰ Patrick himself does not provide any explicit references from which to assign a timeframe for his mission. However, because the language of the *Confessio* and *Epistola* are fifth century Gaulish Latin,²¹ he dates with some certainty in the fifth century.²² An early schema, supported by Muirchú's²³ seventh century *Vita S. Patricii*, (the first of the Patrician *Lives*), places Patrick's return to Ireland in 432 CE and death at 457/461 CE. Alfred Smyth²⁴ notes that this early dating lacks connection between the time of Patrick and the flourishing of Irish Christianity (what some term the "age of saints"²⁵ in the early sixth century). Further, it does not follow with the episcopal status of Patrick upon his return to Ireland. The Irish *Annals* place his elevation to bishop in 441 CE, nine years after his supposed arrival in Ireland. Therefore, a later dating²⁶ for the Patrician mission stands on stronger ground because it allows for his return after his episcopal elevation in 441CE. It

²⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-Logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

²¹ Aidan Nicols, "The Roman Primacy in the Ancient Irish and Anglo-Celtic Church," in *Il Primato Del Vescovo Di Roma Nel Primo Millennio : Ricerche E Testimonianze: Atti Del Symposium Storico-Teologico, Roma, 9-13 Ottobre 1989*, ed. Michele Maccarrone, *Atti E Documenti (Pontificio Comitato Di Scienze Storiche)* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), 480.

²² Neither Gildas a British contemporary of Patrick and author of the *Chronica Majora* nor Bede writing in the seventh century and author of the *Historica Ecclesiastica* mention Patrick although both note Palladius' mission to the Irish. Their similarity can be explained by Bede's dependence on Gildas' work. M. Miller, "Bede's Use of Gildas," *English Historical Review* 90, no. 355 (1975): 246.

²³ Muirchu, "Vita Patricii."

²⁴ Alfred P. Smyth, "Bishop Patrick and the Earliest Christian Mission to Ireland," in *Christianity in Ireland: Revisiting the Story*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (Blackrock: Columba Press, 2002), 19.

²⁵ Nora K. Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (Felinfach, : Llanerch 1961).

²⁶ This latter scheme is gaining credibility among scholars. de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*, 89. and Tomás Ó Fiaich, "The Beginnings of Christianity," in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1994; reprint, 2001), 44.

coincides with the later purported dates for his death at 492/493 CE and allows for continuity between Patrick and other prominent early Irish figures such as Secundinus, Auxilius, Brigit, Ciarán of Saighir, Moninna and Finnian of Clonard, a key factor for the success and further promulgation of the Christian faith in Ireland.

Although Patrick does not refer to the Palladian mission that seems to have been centered in Leinster, neither does he claim to have converted all of Ireland, whose population at the time was “between 200,000 and 500,000.”²⁷ Drawing upon toponymy (place names), archaeology, local tradition, annals, and other texts, it becomes possible to place Patrick’s primary missionary activity in an area in Ireland north of a line from Galway to Wexford²⁸ with a strong concentration in Northern Connacht and Ulster²⁹ and sporadic activity reaching into Leinster and Mide). (Fig.10)

While the later *Vitae* emphasize contests with kings and druids, the writings of Patrick relate evangelistic efforts among the Irish people, interacting with kings primarily in the payment for protection.³⁰ Where the *Vitae* focus on miracles and demonstrations of power and authority, Patrick summarizes his mission, (*Conf.* 35) in terms of preaching, baptism, and the imitation of Christ. The Christianity of Patrick was a faith movement that encountered the noble classes but embraced and was warmly received by those of lower social stature.

²⁷ de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*, 23.

²⁸ Ó Fiaich, "The Beginnings of Christianity," 43.

²⁹ Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 46.

³⁰ Patrick remarks about physical dangers faced in his missionary efforts and that the great need to purchase goodwill and protection from kings in order to proceed in his mission. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 28.

Patrick's success did not rest upon miracles but upon his pedagogical approach that integrated a concern for physical and spiritual welfare with practical experiences and Christian theology. The *Epistola ad Croticus*, written after Patrick received the news of the murder of newly baptized Christians by Croticus³¹ and his soldiers, demonstrates the concern of Patrick the bishop with those under his charge. Rather than mourn the loss of the murdered believers privately, Patrick writes a letter with the intent that the recipient will proclaim it to the soldiers who committed the murderous acts (*Ep.* 2). The letter is a vehicle of reproach not only for the murders of the neophytes but also for the other horrendous acts against Christians (*Ep.* 9, 13, 19). The *Epistola* not only condemns the actions against Christians, it also acts as an invitation to conversion,

If this happens then God may inspire them and that they may return to him. For though it be very late, it may be they will repent of their impious actions[...]. Thus they would merit to live in God and be healed for this life and eternity.

(*Ep.* 21)

The *Epistola*, condemns sin and invites the evildoers to repentance and conversion, and, in doing so, he uses biblical texts and his own angst as the basis of the message. This integrated, carefully crafted letter presents an image of Patrick as bishop, man of God, and educator.

³¹ The accepted identity of Croticus is that he was an Irish slaver of Romano-British descent. For a detailed discussion of the identity of Croticus, refer to E.A. Thompson, "St. Patrick and Croticus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1980).



Figure 10: Places Associated with Patrick

The Patrician hagiographical materials³² served as much as tributes to the man and his mission as catechetical and propagandistic materials. These traditions portray Patrick as hero, brother of the common people, head of the Irish Church, and

³² I explore the catechetical aspects and theological content of the Patrician hagiographical materials in chapter 3. I introduce them here as retrospective texts concerning the mission of Patrick.

lawgiver³³ — all roles recognizable and held in admiration by the indigenous Irish culture. His venerated status is evident in St. Cummian's seventh century letter to the community at Iona in which he refers to Patrick as "the holy Patrick, our papa."³⁴

In the seventh century when Muirchú and Tirechán were writing the earliest (extant) *Lives of Patrick*,³⁵ the Irish Church was embroiled in two controversies concerning both internal issues and matters pertaining to Rome, namely the Paschal Controversy and competition for Irish primacy. The Paschal Controversy concerned the use of either a 19 or 84 year table for the computation of the celebration of Easter.³⁶ This issue divided the Irish church for a time with the southern half of the island moving first to alignment with Rome (19 year) in 631CE while the North did not acquiesce until 716 CE. It is in this context that the modern reader should view the magnificent story in Muirchú's *Vita* of Patrick's conflict with King Loíguire surrounding the lighting of a fire to celebrate Easter.³⁷

³³ Seumas MacManus, *The Story of the Irish Race: A Popular History of Ireland*, Rev. ed., vol. "Forty-first printing, Feb. 1990." (Old Greenwich: Devin-Adair Co., 1990), 126.

³⁴ Cummian, "Letter to Segéne of Iona on the Easter Question," in *St. Patrick's World*, ed. Liam De Paor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), 152.

³⁵ Both refer to the (now lost) *Book of Ultán*.

³⁶ Charges of Judaizing quartodecimianism that were alleged against the Irish Church proved to be without merit, and the issue at hand was which computus, the Old Roman (which came to be called the Celtic table) or the Dionysiac/Alexandrian table would be the one to determine the date of Easter for the entire Roman church. The Old Roman (or Celtic/Irish) table was based on an eighty-four year cycle which set the boundaries for Easter as the Sunday after the first full moon between the fourteenth and twentieth of the lunar month (25 March -21 April) and had no prohibition against Easter to coinciding with Passover. The Alexandrian table was based on a nineteen cycle and set the limitations for Easter to be Sunday after the first full moon between the fifteenth and twenty-first of the lunar month (22 March – 25 April) and prohibited any overlap between Easter and Passover. Robert E. McNally, "The Old Irish Church and Romanization," in *The Romanization Tendency*, ed. Jacob Vellian, *The Syrian Churches* (Kottayam: Deepika Book Stall, 1975), 9.

³⁷ Davies translates the celebration as that of Passover while dePaor uses the traditional translation of Easter. Muirchu, "Vita Patricii."

The second controversy that influenced the *Vitae* was the struggle between the diocesan and monastic ecclesial models for primacy in the Irish Church. The issue at hand was not which model of church to propagate as more people converted and the need increased for more churches, but where to locate the metropolitan see. The monastic towns of Kildare competed with Armagh for authority. Both Tírechán and Muirchú supported Armagh and their narratives emphasize the connection between Patrick and Armagh likening it to the relationship between Peter and Rome.³⁸ Tírechán's account of Patrick's missionary journey served to connect the churches named in the text to Patrick, thus bringing them into the fold of the Armagh's *paruchia* (family of churches). In the end while Armagh drew on canon and native law to establish national primacy, Kildare retained regional authority allowing Armagh to court the rest of the country.³⁹

The retrospective nature of the *Vitae* may have had some influence on the annalistic entries thus explaining the discrepancies in the chronology of the Patrician mission. As noted above, Muirchú credited Patrick, not Palladius for the conversion of Ireland. His placement of the arrival of Patrick (432 CE) so soon after the date of Palladius (431 CE) undermines any successes that the latter may have had while garnering support for Patrick (and thereby Armagh). On the other hand, the latter dating for the death of Patrick may be the result of an overzealous annalist who sought to draw parallels between Moses and Patrick. If Patrick were (as tradition holds) sixty years of

³⁸ Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition*, 62.

³⁹ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 161-162.

age when he returned to Ireland in 432CE, his death in 492 would make him also one hundred twenty years of age – the age of Moses (Dt 34:7).

These trends in amplifying aspects of Patrick's ministry do not undermine his evangelistic efforts; rather they uphold the importance of his mission and its apparent success in spreading Christianity throughout Ireland. Indeed, the Ireland that Patrick first encountered was a society rife with oppression, greed, and that "had no knowledge of God" (*Conf.* 42). Patrick left Ireland for the land of his birth but he returned to the land that "called" to him and claimed him as its own. Although there are inconsistencies in the place⁴⁰ and date of his death, there is no doubt that by the end of his life, Christianity had begun to flourish in Ireland, which transformed Irish society immeasurably.

The Church in Early Ireland

The usual claims to the particularity of the Irish Church focus on its approach to penance,⁴¹ tonsure,⁴² and the Paschal controversy.⁴³ While I do not deny the importance of these three aspects of Irish Christianity, a pedagogical triad better expresses its particularity:

- 1) The integration of native and Christian values while remaining orthodox in belief.
- 2) The synthesis and adaptation of ecclesial models to meet the cultural needs of the communities.

⁴⁰ There are two graves for Patrick, one at the summit of Croagh Patrick Co. Mayo, and the more likely, Saul Co Down.

⁴¹ Irish Penance and the *Penitentials* is discussed in chapter 3.

⁴² There were three methods of tonsure, 1) *Tonsura Sancta Petri* which involved shaving the top of head that formed a crown 2) *Tonsura Sancti Pauli* which meant to shave the whole head, and 3) *Tonsura Sancta Iohannis* to shave a line joining the ears or half crown (also known as the Irish tonsure). McNally, "The Old Irish Church and Romanization," 8.

⁴³ see n 36 above.

3) The high regard for pastoral care and education of the laity.

Its strength and persistence rested upon its diversity⁴⁴ and adaptability so that the orthodox Christian faith of Rome became the Christian faith of Ireland.

The reader who begins to examine the early Irish Church enters a field with diverse scholarly opinions. On the one hand, there is Nora Chadwick who insists, "The Celtic Church [...] expresses the Christian ideal with a sanctity and sweetness which have never been surpassed."⁴⁵ While on the other, Michael Richter claims, "There never was a Celtic Church as such."⁴⁶ Where Chadwick, drawing upon the nineteenth century work of J.H.Todd, emphasizes the monastic, "When it comes before us in the sixth century the Irish Church is presented to us as a wholly monastic one [...],"⁴⁷ Richter counters with "It would be a mistake, nevertheless to describe the Irish Church from the 6th century on as a monastic church."⁴⁸ In the ensuing description, I propose that it is not easy to paint a picture of the early Irish Church as either or non-monastic, Celtic or non-Celtic because

⁴⁴ Richard Sharpe, in his work on pastoral care brought the concept of diversity in the early Irish Church to the forefront of any subsequent discussion. Richard Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," *Peritia* 3 (1984). Richard Sharpe, "Churches and Communities in Early Medieval Ireland: Towards a Pastoral Model," in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. John Blair (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992).

⁴⁵ Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, 2.

⁴⁶ Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition*, 62.

⁴⁷ Todd proposed the theory of a dramatic change from an episcopal to monastic organization after the fifth century. His theory was *de rigueur* until the late twentieth century when the appreciation for stronger episcopal foundations and continuity developed. James Henthorn Todd, *St. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland: A Memoir of His Life and Mission, with an Introductory Dissertation on Some Early Usages of the Church in Ireland, and Its Historical Position from the Establishment of the English Colony to the Present Day* (Dublin: Hodges Smith, 1864). Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, 23.

⁴⁸ Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition*, 61. Richard Sharpe concurs, "It is inappropriate therefore to speak of a revolutionary change from an episcopal to a monastic church." Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," 265. as does Leo Swan, "Nevertheless it is accepted that at no time did the monastic system become exclusively dominant." Leo Swan, "Ecclesiastical Settlement in Ireland" (paper presented at the L'environnement des Églises et las Topographie Religieuse des Campagnes mé dié Vales; Actes du IIIe Congrès International d'Archéologie mé dié Vale., Aix en Provence, France, 1994), 51.

the early Irish Church embraced monasticism *and* an episcopally grounded organizational image. It allowed latitude in practice and spirituality, all the while acknowledging the primacy of Rome and adhering to orthodox doctrines.

The *Vitae* and works of Patrick present an image of a man traversing the island teaching and baptizing the newly converted while struggling with the existing local authorities (kings). Based upon patterns of Christian evangelization in Asia Minor and on the Continent, the presumptive process the conversion of Ireland was, if Patrick (or one of his successors) were successful in converting the king of a *túath*, his subjects would also convert.

Following the typical pattern of conversion, Ó Crónín goes so far as to state that “some early conversions would have come in the context of mixed marriages, perhaps with members of the captive⁴⁹ British population.”⁵⁰ While the impetuses for conversion may vary, it is beyond doubt that, beginning in fifth century Ireland, widespread conversion to Christianity began to occur.

In either event, the Christianization of Ireland, begun in earnest with Palladius and Patrick, was a slow process that spanned several centuries, a time in which a “shift in the



Figure 11: Drumhallagh Slab County Donegal (used with permission)

⁴⁹ It is important to bear in mind that it was the Irish who made raids into Roman-Britain capturing slaves as in the case of Patrick above.

⁵⁰ Ó Crónín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 27. James Muldoon comments that the practice of Christianization by intermarriage “transformed the heart of society.” James Muldoon, *Identity on the Medieval Irish Frontier: Degenerate Englishmen, Wild Irishmen, Middle Nations* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 9.

imaginative horizons”⁵¹ of the Irish people was underway. The seventh century *Synod of Patrick* refers to interactions with pagans repeatedly, demonstrating the vitality of paganism two centuries after Patrick. An eighth century cross slab at Drumhallagh, Co. Donegal includes both Christian and pagan motifs: two figures representing bishops (with croziers) positioned under the Irish mythological figure Finn McCool who is sucking the thumb of wisdom, a pagan motif. (Fig.11) The intertwining of Christianity and paganism is also evident in the literary corpus where as late as the ninth century, Irish pagan images interweave with Christian ones. Although H.C. Mytum claims that the church was fully integrated into the Irish society by the eighth century,⁵² this integration was not an obliteration of the pagan culture; it took the form of a marriage that formed a *union* of traditions, symbols, and practices.

A Typological Perspective

The Church in Ireland, as in other parts of the world, was one of cultural adaptation in practice and organization while it remained a church of orthodoxy in doctrine and belief. The Church that developed in Ireland (because of the efforts of Patrick and Palladius before him) was initially organized⁵³ using continental ecclesial patterns of episcopal authority.⁵⁴ Patrick, who returned to Ireland as a bishop,⁵⁵ makes no

⁵¹ Peter Brown and Robert Lamont, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 16.

⁵² Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 75.

⁵³ While this initial phase was episcopal, the monastic system later became a well-developed and thriving model of the church in Ireland as we shall see below.

⁵⁴ Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, 119. Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition*, 62.

⁵⁵ Although the *Annals* (Table 1) portray Patrick’s elevation to bishop after his return to Ireland, Patrick himself does not agree with this chronology and states that he returned to Ireland as a bishop. *Conf* 26-33.

mention of monasteries,⁵⁶ indeed there is no record of monastic communities existing in Ireland before 535-540 CE.⁵⁷ In fact, Tomás Ó Fiaich notes, “Patrick’s immediate successors were bishops”⁵⁸ not abbots.

Yet the monastic movement made its way to Ireland and coexisted with the episcopal model of church causing adaptations for the role of the Irish bishop. In Ireland, the bishops retained sacramental authority while ceding administrative and popular authority to abbots.⁵⁹ The bishops also reserved for themselves the functions of consecrating churches and altars, ordaining priests and deacons, blessing the holy oils, and conferring the sacrament of Confirmation. The bishop, not the abbot, was responsible for pastoral care of the laity.⁶⁰ Colmán Etchingham summarizes the non-sacramental episcopal duties as, “he was obliged to care for the needy, receive pilgrims, supervise

⁵⁶ However, he does mention the monks and virgins for Christ, Patricus, *Confessio*.§41.

⁵⁷ de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*, 49.

⁵⁸ Ó Fiaich, "The Beginnings of Christianity," 45. Of the early foundations, bishops “are numbered among the heads of Ardstraw, Aughrim, Clonard, Clonenagh, Connor, Devenis, Ferns, Inishboffin, Lusk, Nendrum, Mayo, Sletty, and perhaps Glendalough.” Colmán Etchingham, "Bishops in the Early Irish Church," *Studia Hibernica* 28 (1994): 48.

⁵⁹ Picard includes a discussion of *abbas* and *princeps* as titles within the monastic setting. At times the terms referred to the same role and at others they were distinct. For the purposes of this study of monastic and episcopal settlements, my delineation is *abbas* / *princeps* vs. *episcopos*. Jean Michel Picard, "Principes and Principatus in the Early Irish Church," in *Seanchas : Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History, and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

⁶⁰ Both the *Rule of Tallaght* and the *Riagail Phatraic* situate pastoral care within the duties of the bishop. These texts probably rely upon the Council of Clofesho (747) which distinguishes between the episcopal and monastic duties, communities, and responsibilities towards the laity. Catherine Cubitt, "Pastoral Care and Conciliar Canons: The Provisions of the 747 Council of Clofesho," in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leister: Leister University Press, 1992). The similarities between these texts is worth noting because whereas the *Riagail Phatraic* is a text connected with Armagh and, as such, one would expect a focus on episcopal roles, the *Rule of Tallaght* is a monastic text but concurs. Sharpe, "Churches and Communities in Early Medieval Ireland: Towards a Pastoral Model," 99-102.

penitents, redeem captives, protect widows and orphans, and provide hospitality.”⁶¹

Further, in the Irish context, where honor price reflected societal status, the law texts situate bishop and king on an equal level, represented by equivalency in their honor price.⁶² As such, the bishop assumed a similar role to the Irish king as “adjudicator of ecclesiastical causes [settling] testamentary disputes and hear[ing] all cases involving clergy.”⁶³

Ecclesial organization and administration in Early Ireland was fluid. There was a later period where monastic settlements rose in prominence, thereby overshadowing the episcopal structures. Yet even during this process, the Irish Church never swayed from identification with the Church of Rome. It was common for Irish *peregrini* (pilgrims) to make the arduous journey to Rome to pray at the tomb of Peter and to return to Ireland with relics of the continental saints. Respect for Roman authority is evident in the early seventh century letter of Columbanus to Pope Boniface (concerning the Paschal Controversy) in which he addresses the pontiff as, “*Pulcherrimo omnium totius Europae Ecclesiarum Capiti, Papae praedulci, praeclso Praesuli, Pastorum Pastori, reverendissimo Speculatori.*”⁶⁴ (To the most fair head of all the churches of the whole of Europe, to the most lovable pope, the most exalted prelate, shepherd of shepherds.) As

⁶¹ Etchingham, "Bishops in the Early Irish Church," 39.

⁶² “Let everyone who has dared to steal or seize those things that belong to a king or bishop, or to commit any (offence) against him, thinking little of despising them, pay the value of seven female slaves or do penance for seven years with a bishop or scribe.” Binchy, ed., *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, XLVIII.§5. See also John Ryan, "The Early Church and the See of Peter," in *Medieval Studies. Presented to Aubrey Gwynn*, ed. J. A. Watt, J. B. Morrall, and F. X. Martin (Dublin: C. O. Lochlainn, 1961), 7.

⁶³ Etchingham, "Bishops in the Early Irish Church," 39.

⁶⁴ Columbanus, *Epistola V to Boniface* (University College Cork, 2004 613 [cited 15 February 2008]); available from <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/L201054/index.html>.

the letter continues, Columbanus explicitly declares Irish orthodoxy,

*Nos enim sanctorum Petri et Pauli et omnium discipulorum divinum canonem spiritu sancto scribentium discipuli sumus, toti Iberi, ultimi habitatores mundi, nihil extra evangelicam et apostolicam doctrinam recipientes; nullus hereticus, nullus Iudaeus, nullus schismaticus fuit; sed fides catholica, sicut a vobis primum, sanctorum videlicet apostolorum successoribus, tradita est, inconcussa tenetur.*⁶⁵

Epistola V

(For all we Irish, inhabitants of the world's edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Spirit, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching; none has been a heretic, none a Judaizer, none a schismatic; but the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the holy apostles, is maintained unbroken.)

Despite the praise of the pope, and the assertion of Irish conformity, Columbanus continues confidently into potentially dangerous waters, offering criticism and correction to the pope,

Ego instigo vos, meos patres ac proprios patronos, ad depellendam confusionem de facie filiorum vestrorum ac discipulorum, qui pro vobis confunduntur, et quod his maius est, ut caligo suspicionis tollatur de cathedra sancti Petri. [...] Et ideo sicut magnus honor vester est pro dignitate cathedrae, ita magna cura vobis necessaria est, ut non perdati vestram dignitatem propter aliquam perversitatem. Tam diu enim potestas apud vos erit, quamdiu recta ratio permanserit; ille enim certus regni

*caelorum clavicularius est, qui dignis per veram scientiam aperit et indignis claudit; alioquin si contraria fecerit, nec aperire nec claudere poterit.*⁶⁶

Epistola V

(I summon you, my fathers and my own patrons, to dispel confusion from before the face of your sons and disciples, who are confounded for your sakes, and (what is more than this) to remove the cloud of suspicion from St. Peter's chair. [...] And thus, even as your honour [sic] is great in

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

proportion to the dignity of your see, so great care is needful for you, lest you lose your dignity through some mistake. For power will be in your hands just so long as your principles remain sound; for he is the appointed key-bearer of the Kingdom of Heaven, who opens by true knowledge to the worthy and shuts to the unworthy; otherwise if he does the opposite, he shall be able neither to open nor to shut.)

Columbanus' critique is not for the safety of the man, Boniface; rather, the letter offers counsel for the sake of the *unity* of the Church. This text does not reflect a man who, as an Irish monk, had little regard for the Roman Church. They are the words of a man who cared for his pontiff, was proud of the Irish affiliation with Rome, and sought benefit for the universal Roman church. This is representative of the early Irish Church, which was an amalgamation of episcopal and abbatial authority with indigenous and Christian expressions, but was nevertheless Catholic and Roman.

Ecclesial Organizational and Material Aspects of the Early Irish Church

How did the early Irish Church take shape? Initially the site for the building of ecclesial settlements was in the boundary areas under the protection of the *túath* but “not in the heart of the kin groups in case the ideology changed.”⁶⁷ As kings converted to (or tolerated) Christianity, they donated lands for ecclesiastical settlements with the expectation that the church/monastery would render him, as a client of the king dues and other social obligations. While there is ample archaeological evidence for monastic communities or communities associated with a particular saint's cult, there are also a number of early religious sites without such a connection.

Cross/stone slabs served as territorial markers or devotional objects.⁶⁸ In almost

⁶⁷ Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 63.

⁶⁸ Liam De Paor, drawing upon crosses at Monasterboice, Clonmacnoise, and Kinitty (among others), postulates that stone crosses (inscribed slabs or high crosses) in fact may be royal monuments. Liam de

all of the ruins of the earliest Christian sites, it appears that the first “structure” was a cemetery, followed by the addition of a shrine, then church itself and other buildings.⁶⁹ As the site developed, they expanded to include, oratories, beehive shaped huts, bullaun stones, souterrains, and a holy well.⁷⁰ The church buildings were often very small leading to the practice of liturgical celebrations held (at least partly) outdoors. The attention to the burial grounds, inclusion of holy wells and bullaun stones—all pagan items—in a Christian religious site reflects the integration of pre-Christian and Christian ideologies. These complexes are not simply the ruins of a church building with an adjacent cemetery; they are settlements that indicate a sense of communal activity centered upon religious faith.

The ecclesial organization in Ireland synthesized the Roman episcopal model with the native system of social stratification.⁷¹ Within each religious complex, there were seven grades or orders: lector, usher, exorcist, sub-deacon, deacon, priest, and bishop.⁷² Charles-Edwards notes, “It is no accident that the scheme of the seven grades of the church appears to have been worked out in Ireland in the sixth or seventh centuries as the

Paor, *Ireland and Early Europe: Essays and Occasional Writings on Art and Culture* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 189.

⁶⁹ Christina Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church: Ireland, 450-1150* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 49.

⁷⁰ Swan, “Ecclesiastical Settlement in Ireland”, 52-53.

⁷¹ see above pp 56 ff Etchingham, “Bishops in the Early Irish Church,” 35-36.

⁷² Of course, Aquinas writing at least five hundred years later, in his discussion of the orders of the church refers to a similar delineation of the orders with a greater focus on the clerical rather than lay participation. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Benzinger Bros. 1947) (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [cited 5 November 2007]); available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html>. *Supp.* Q.37.

result of an effort to produce a consistent picture of social status which would embrace both the laity and the church.”⁷³

Even the names of the sites reflect diversity. The title *domnach* refers to an early foundation.⁷⁴ A derivative of the Latin *dominicum*, a *domnach* is usually associated with Patrick and represents a church settlement established in a settled community (e.g. Donaghmore). *Cell*, from the Latin *cella*, began as a referent to a church or developed cemetery⁷⁵ but evolved into “the standard term for a monastic foundation”⁷⁶ (e.g. Kildare). While *domnach* and *cell* became the most widespread terms for religious settlements, there were others as well: *dísert* meaning “hermitage” (e.g. Desertegeny), and *tech* meaning “house” (e.g. Tech ná Roman).⁷⁷ The seventh century *Liber Angeli* describes a three-fold classification of these early religious sites:

- 1) *ecclesia libera* – a church unattached to any monastic or ecclesial federation and free from any obligations of clientship;
- 2) *civitas ab aepiscopali gradu* – a city of episcopal rank such as Armagh (which was founded as an episcopal see);⁷⁸
- 3) *domnach* – an early foundation probably under a clientship agreement

⁷³ T.M. Charles-Edwards, "The Pastoral Role of the Church in the Early Irish Laws," in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 68.

⁷⁴ By the latter part of the sixth century it was no longer used in association with new foundations. Deidre Flanagan, "The Christian Impact on Early Ireland: Place-Names Evidence," in *Irland Und Europa : Die Kirche Im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, *Veröffentlichungen Des Europa Zentrums Tübingen. Kulturwissenschaftliche Reihe* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 28-31.

⁷⁵ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 37.

⁷⁶ Flanagan, "The Christian Impact on Early Ireland: Place-Names Evidence," 31-32.

⁷⁷ “*Tech*” is also an early term and associated with Palladius. All of the above titles were in common usage before the eighth century. These titles do not reflect regional traditions (settlements of similar titles are not clustered geographically or topographically); they spread throughout the entire island and reflect individual communities’ understanding of the role of the church in their own ‘*tuath*’ or kin group.

⁷⁸ Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," 261.

with a local king.⁷⁹

In the foundational aspects, the vocabulary of identification, and the corresponding roles of the ecclesial community, we find a representation of the early Irish Church as a variegation of purpose, identity, and activity that intertwined Irish and Roman, laity and clergy, familiar and new resulting in vibrant communities of Christian witness and evangelization.

For years, the scholarly consensus on the early Irish Church was that the monastic model succeeded because of its overlay onto the existing system of *túath*. However, Alfred Smyth notes that diocesan models also accommodate such tribal structures as evidenced in Anglo-Saxon areas.⁸⁰ In fact, as Richard Sharpe observes, the episcopal model of ecclesial administration finds closer parallels in the social stratification of the native Irish culture than would the monastic model. Nevertheless, the monastic system did develop and flourish in Ireland. This did not equate with a decline in the number of bishops. In fact, according to the entries in the *Annals of Ulster*, the number of *abbas* fluctuates, peaking in the eight century, while the number of *episcopos* remains steady.⁸¹ Therefore, even though the monastic model reached a period of unrivaled success, the episcopal model remained a necessary model of church and did not suffer decline or

⁷⁹ These descriptions and their eponyms are from the *Liber Angeli* and translated by Swan in Swan, "Ecclesiastical Settlement in Ireland", 50. Sharpe interprets them a bit differently as 1) participant churches (clientship), 2) churches of a hereditary founder, and 3) churches under family control. Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," 261.

⁸⁰ That the continental pattern was used without continental infrastructure (roads, cities, towns) is noted by Ó Cróinín, Bieler, and Sharpe. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 27. and Ludwig Bieler, *Ireland, Harbinger of the Middle Ages* (London ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 12. Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," 242." Smyth, "Bishop Patrick and the Earliest Christian Mission to Ireland," 19.

⁸¹ Picard, "Princeps and Principatus in the Early Irish Church," 149.

elimination. The Irish Christian faith was a synthesis and so too was the ecclesial system that developed thereby producing a hybrid of diverse models of church existing side by side with neither subsuming the other.

Monasticism

To understand the development of Irish monasticism, one must set it within the three major movements of the Christian evangelization of Ireland. Palladius and Patrick's efforts in the fifth century represent the beginning of intentional Christian evangelization in Ireland. Moninna and Brigit are often associated with Patrick in the hagiographical materials⁸² and, together with Secundinus and Auxilius, are representative of the first movement.⁸³ In the sixth century, the group traditionally referred to as the Twelve Apostles of Ireland⁸⁴ came to prominence and represent the second movement. The Irish, seeking to stand firmly within the Christian tradition, applied this title to the prominent ecclesial founders (some abbots and others bishops) who had strong associations with the "Father of Irish Monasticism" Finnian of Clonard⁸⁵ are those who receive credit for continuing the Patrician mission. Finally, in the late sixth to eighth centuries, the third movement occurred. Including Finnian of Moville, Jarlath of Tuam, Finbar of Cork, Comhghall of Bangor, and Kevin of Glendalough, this third group is remarkable because

⁸² Some accounts claim that Moninna was in fact the sister of Patrick. Cogitosus claims that Patrick himself baptized Brigit's mother.

⁸³ While Patrick mentions the "monks and virgins," (*Conf.* §41) there is no evidence of monastic foundations in Ireland dating from the fifth century; most date to almost one hundred years after Patrick. de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*, 3.

⁸⁴ Finnian of Clonard, Ciaran of Saighir, Columba of Terryglass, Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, Senan of Iniscathay, Mobhi of Glasnevin, Brendan of Clonfert, Molaisse of Devenish, Brendan of Birr, Ruadhain of Lorrha, Cainneach of Aghaboe, and Columcille of Derry, Durrow, and Iona. Ó Fiaich, "The Beginnings of Christianity," 46.

⁸⁵ At this early stage some ecclesial leaders held the title of both abbot and bishop.

unlike the “Twelve,” they have no association to Finnian of Clonard or his monastic federation.⁸⁶ This period earned the title of the “Golden Age” of Irish monasticism.

How did monastic settlements originate and why did they flourish in Ireland? Should the historical theologian consider that the Christian faith offered something so remarkable to the native Irish that they flocked to the monastic founders begging for baptism? I think not. However, there was a confluence of circumstances that proved beneficial for monasticism to take root and flourish in Ireland. As in the East, a Christian would withdraw from pagan society, creating a small hermitage for himself.⁸⁷ Word soon spread about the holy man living alone, praying and worshipping God in solitude; soon people sought him out for spiritual guidance and intercessory prayers. Some of these seekers, because of intense admiration for the holy man, began to join him, and a small coenobitic community formed.

While European and Eastern monastic communities became places of isolation, those in Ireland became centers of learning and spirituality for the greater community. Situated in highly accessible areas on the banks of rivers, on main roads and in close proximity to native forts,⁸⁸ monastic centers became self-sustaining communities similar to the native *túath*. The years of the greatest growth in Irish monastic communities correspond to times of widespread pestilence and mass deaths in the general population.

⁸⁶ Ó Fiaich, "The Beginnings of Christianity." A monastic federation is a monastic family that shares an association with a saint or great founder. Durrow, Iona, and Derry are considered the monastic federation of Columille.

⁸⁷ Although the women's monasteries flourished at the same time, women do not appear to have sought out solitude and hermitages. Women's communities appear to have begun as imitation of the men's communities whose beginnings I describe here.

⁸⁸ Kathleen Hughes, "The Golden Age of Early Christian Ireland," in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F.X. Martin (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 59.

The location and accessibility allowed for the rapid growth of the monastic communities – they became places of refuge from the epidemics (Figure 12) that ravaged the communities outside the walls of the monastic towns.

The complexes included a surrounding wall, church, refectory, library, scriptorium, and housing units.⁸⁹ Larger settlements also included guesthouses for pilgrims and other travelers.⁹⁰ Hospitality to the stranger or pilgrim was an important component of Irish monastic life⁹¹ and an offering of *cuirm* (beer) to the guest, the highest expression of conviviality. Therefore, many monastic communities had a resident *scoaire* or *ceribsire* (professional brewer).⁹² As the community expanded, they became small towns with workshops, barns, forges, and limekilns.⁹³ These communities grew in both members and buildings⁹⁴ and soon monastic centers filled the Irish landscape. (Fig. 13)

Early Irish Christianity held women in a special regard.⁹⁵ Brigit, Moninna, Íte, and Samhthann founded churches and monastic communities.⁹⁶ Their *Vitae* portray them

⁸⁹ Ó Fiaich, "The Beginnings of Christianity," 48. Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 80.

⁹⁰ Bieler, *Ireland, Harbinger of the Middle Ages*, 48.

⁹¹ Drawing upon the Irish practice of hospitality in pre-Christian Ireland. See chapter 1.

⁹² Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming: A Study Based Mainly on the Law-Texts of the 7th and 8th Centuries Ad*, 5 vols., vol. 4, *Early Irish Law Series* (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1997), 332-333.

⁹³ Tomás Ó Fiaich, "The Monastic Life in Early Christian Ireland," *Capuchin Annual* 36 (1969): 124.

⁹⁴ Wood was the usual material of construction, although in the South and West, wood and stone structures existed. Bieler, *Ireland, Harbinger of the Middle Ages*, 27.

⁹⁵ see above pp 46-47 for a discussion of women in Patrick's writings.

⁹⁶ Women as well as men founded church communities i.e. Brigit – Kildare, Moninna – Killeevy, Íte – Kileedy, Samhthann – Clonbroney, and Caireach – Cloonburren. Other less well known female founders include Lasair, Ricinn, and Cairech. For a further discussion of the roles of women in the early Irish

as learned, capable women of action and strong leadership. In religious life, women also filled key roles such as abbesses or, as *conhospitae* (celibate women living among celibate men) who distributed the chalice at Eucharist.⁹⁷ When the influx of population to the monastic communities occurred, it was not only men seeking the religious life who joined the community; women and men (married and single), and boys and girls, comprised the *manaig* (the monastic family).⁹⁸

Church, I refer you to Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church: Ireland, 450-1150*, . and Ó Fiaich, "The Monastic Life in Early Christian Ireland," 119.

⁹⁷ Catherine Philomena Thom, "The Ascetical Theology and Praxis of Sixth to Eighth Century Irish Monasticism as a Radical Response to the Evangelium" (Australian Catholic University, 2002), 10.

⁹⁸ Although usually understood as monastic family or tenants of the monastery, Etchingham defines the term as "a class which was in relationship of socio-economic, legal, and pastoral dependence on the church." this definition demonstrates the full inculcation of the Irish Church into the lives of the Irish people. Etchingham, "Bishops in the Early Irish Church," 40.

Year	Disaster	Notes	Event
500		<i>Age of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland</i>	Beginning of Irish Monasticism
542	Unknown Plague		
549	Bubonic Plague		
554	Smallpox/Cholera/Dysentery		
599			
664-665	Bubonic Plague		
667 – 668	Bubonic Plague		
680	Leprosy	<i>Golden Age of Irish Monasticism</i> The term <i>abbas</i> gains predominance over <i>episcopus</i> in the <i>Annals of Ulster</i> .	
683-684	Bubonic Plague		
698-700	Famine		
700 – 703	Colic Disease/Poliomyelitis		
742	Leprosy		
742-743	Smallpox/Cholera/Dysentery		
764-778	Smallpox/Cholera/Dysentery		
769	Leprosy		
779	Leprosy		Céli Dé Monastic Reform
783	Pneumonia/Flu		
786	Pneumonia/Flu		
800	Pneumonia/Flu		
814	Pneumonia/Flu		
825	Famine/Plague/Pneumonia/Flu		

Figure 12: Pestilences, Plagues, and Famines in Early Ireland



Figure 13: The Three Waves of Irish Evangelization

Michael Curran describes life within the monastery as a:

[L]ife of wholehearted commitment to the following of Christ; a life built around times of prayer, the Sunday Eucharist, the hours of working in the fields, in the workshops, in the scriptorium, in the cells where so much studying and teaching went on day by day.⁹⁹

The abbot, monks and *manaig* worked alongside one another in all aspects of labor, growing crops, making vessels for liturgical and daily uses, fishing, so that the monastery was a self-sustaining community.¹⁰⁰ Even after the reforms of the late eighth century, when the community became more of a monastery proper, the Irish monastic settlement remained a “small city where learning was shared, liturgy was celebrated and hospitality dispensed.”¹⁰¹

In the monastic community, the Irish people found “the tribal structures of Irish society continued unbroken [...] with the individual remaining bound to a group.”¹⁰² While the organization of life within the monastery mirrored the native Irish society with clearly defined, roles located within a system of social hierarchy, it was more than an overlay onto the túath.¹⁰³

As monasteries gained wealth and stature, problems both within the community and between other monasteries and churches developed. Abbots frequently selected

⁹⁹ Michael Curran, “Early Irish Monasticism,” in *Irish Spirituality*, ed. Michael Maher (Dublin: Veritas, 1981), 20.

¹⁰⁰ Bieler, *Ireland, Harbinger of the Middle Ages*, 40.

¹⁰¹ Ó Fiaich, “The Monastic Life in Early Christian Ireland,” 129.

¹⁰² Michael Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 60.

¹⁰³ Here I run against Nora Chadwick’s contention that the monastic community was democratic in organization. Although the various *Rules* indicate some degree of collegiality, the organization of the monastic community was undeniably hierarchical with abbots and bishops in control. Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, 30.

successors from within their own *fine*, leading to widespread nepotism. Together with the increasing wealth, struggles between members of federations for supremacy and control led to inter-monastery warfare.¹⁰⁴ In the late eighth century, a movement founded by Máel-Rúain of Tallaght called the *Céle Dé* (Clients of God) sought to turn the monasteries from their materialism and secularization.¹⁰⁵ The *Céle Dé* brought about a more ascetic focus, including an emphasis on individual piety expressed through chastity, prayer, and obedience. The movement died out in the ninth century, but left a lasting mark on Irish monastic life by ushering in conformity to the Eastern and European monastic model that restricted the community to those in religious orders. Despite this, the Irish monastery remained “more closely connected with the neighboring population than were monasteries elsewhere.”¹⁰⁶

The Irish Laws and Canons

As noted earlier, honor was the basis of the native Irish laws along with its corresponding aspects of relationality, respect, and responsibility. The laws’ intent was to support social cohesion within the *túath* where “kinsmen were expected to help and support one another.”¹⁰⁷ The ethos of “love thy neighbor” was present in Ireland before the arrival of Christianity; therefore, it would be an exaggeration to state that Christian values drastically altered the Irish social mores. Rather, an examination of the Irish laws

¹⁰⁴ Clonmacnoise was involved in the first (and many subsequent) of the violent battles. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 594-599. Armagh and Kildare also engaged in (non-violent) conflict pertaining to authority and control.

¹⁰⁵ Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 63.

¹⁰⁶ Bieler, *Ireland, Harbinger of the Middle Ages*, 48.

¹⁰⁷ Kelly, *Early Irish Farming: A Study Based Mainly on the Law-Texts of the 7th and 8th Centuries Ad*, 402.

uncovers not a Christian enculturation of Ireland,¹⁰⁸ but a mutual enrichment between the native Irish culture and Christian faith.

The work generally referred to as the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (*CCH*) (*Irish Collection of Canons*) is an early eighth century¹⁰⁹ compilation of the native Irish oral legal tradition(s)¹¹⁰ together with the Irish Christian legal materials. Unlike the Roman canonical collections, the *CCH* expands the concept of canon law to an all encompassing “code of ecclesiastical structures, of moral teaching, of monastic discipline, of the Church in the world, of spiritual guidance, of pastoral instruction and, as it claims itself, a guide to various and difficult questions.”¹¹¹ The *CCH* contains sixty-seven books and over seven hundred fifty chapters,¹¹² which fuse native Irish law with the corpus of biblical, patristic, and other Christian texts.¹¹³

The *Seanchas Mór* (*Great Tradition*), considered one of the most important components of Irish law, comprises over one third of the *CCH*.¹¹⁴ Among its forty-seven legal tracts, addressing such topics as the laws pertaining to household matters and clientship are the *Córus Bésgnai* (*Order of Discipline*) and its parallel the *Ríagail*

¹⁰⁸ see n2 above

¹⁰⁹ Ruben of Dairinis (d. 725) and Cú Chuimne (d. 747) are generally regarded as the compilers of the *CCH*.

¹¹⁰ Although many of the native Irish laws were similar, there were regional variations.

¹¹¹ Maurice P. Sheehy, "The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*: A Celtic Phenomenon," in *Die Iren Und Europa Im Früheren Mittelalter*, ed. Heinz Löwe (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), 528.

¹¹² Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, 217.

¹¹³ Including Jerome Gregory the Great, Isidore, Basil, Cassian, Eusebius of Caesara, Origen, as well as Nicaea, Ancyra, Gangira, Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, Chalcedon, Laodicea, Neo-Caesarea, Cathage Agde, and Orelans and one hundred twenty items from Irish synods. Ibid, 218-223.

¹¹⁴ Liam Breatnach and Daniel A. Binchy, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 5 vols., vol. 5, *Early Irish Law Series* (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2005), 268.

Phátraic (Rule of Patrick). These two texts, along with the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* (First Judgment of Privileged Ones), clearly delineate the relationship between the Irish Church and its society, and are the texts to which I confine my comments here.

The *Pseudo-Historical Prologue* of the *Seanchas Mór* credits Patrick with combining the *recht aicnid* (natural law) and *recht littre* (written law). The tone of the text is one of reciprocity, both in the relationship between the two *recht* and between the traditional social unit (*túath*) and the new unit – the church. Daniel Melia writes that in it “the church is treated as if it were a major new kin group that has been swallowed up by society.”¹¹⁵ In this vein, the texts present the relationship between church and society as in the old Irish laws like the depiction of the relationship between king and people – a contractual relationship. The laity are entitled to baptism, communion, prayers for the dead, the celebration of the Mass, and to have “the word of God proclaimed to all who will hear.”¹¹⁶ In addition, the bishop is responsible for the spiritual guidance of the laity, either serving himself as an *anam chara* or by providing suitable people to serve as such. In return, the laity are responsible for the material wealth and upkeep of the church through offerings, tithes, maintenance of the church lands and provisions for food and clothing for the clergy.

The *Bretha Nemed Toísech* closely parallels the *Córus Bésgnai*. It, too, is explicit in detailing the mutual obligations between church and laity. According to Fergus Kelley, the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* adds the qualifier, “for the contract to be valid, the

¹¹⁵ Daniel Frederick Melia, “The Irish Church in the Irish Laws,” in *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland: Studies Presented to C.A. Raleigh Radford Arising from a Conference Organised in His Honour*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 373.

¹¹⁶ as quoted in Charles-Edwards, “The Pastoral Role of the Church in the Early Irish Laws,” 71.

Church for its part must give good considerations [...]. Its monks must be devout, its monastic superiors must be honest, and its seven grades of clergy must be properly qualified [...]"¹¹⁷ Throughout the texts, the exchange of material support for spiritual services constitutes the heart of the contract.

Violations of the relationship, by either side,¹¹⁸ incur sanctions, not as punishment, but to force satisfaction by the negligent party. The *CCH* expands the concept of satisfaction to include penance so that the aggrieved parties are both the persons involved and God in Christ, e.g. "wherefore seven years of penance and seven *cumuls* (slaves) are necessary by way of reparation to the Creator."¹¹⁹ The reference to God as a party to the contract reflects the reliance of the *CCH* texts upon Christian source materials. An early Irish poem reflects the understanding of Christ as the High King,

O God of the created universe
 I invoke you, my counselor of grace;
 Do not turn your face towards me yet,
 For you are my true judge
 You are my King, you are my law,
 my heart is for you, my body is for you.
 I love you, good Christ,
 my soul is yours tonight.
 Let me not conceal it, O King:
 may I dwell in your palace for ever;
 may I banquet at your table;
 don't leave me behind, O God.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 41.

¹¹⁸ NB. The parties here are both understood in the collective sense.

¹¹⁹ *Ríagail Phátraic* § 3

¹²⁰ Malachi McCormick, *A Book of Old Irish Monastic Prayer Poems: 8thc.-12thc.*, 1st ed. ed. (Staten Island Stone Street Press, 1986).

As the king, Christ provides protection from plagues, sickness and famine, welcomes the believers to the heavenly banquet, and is the true possessor of *Rulers Truth*. While both parties of the contract (church and laity) were responsible to each other, in the end, their ultimate responsibility was to the honor of God in Christ. A breach of the contract not only offended the injured party; it was “an insult to Christ”¹²¹

To a certain degree, the spread of Christianity in Ireland brought about a transformation of Irish culture. The law texts demonstrate that the Irish accepted Christian faith, precepts, and organization, and embraced them as a new instance of the familial hierarchy with the expectation that this new social group would adhere to the Irish practice of honor. They incorporated not only the persons and their roles, but also the Christian God and the Christian *recht littre* into the Irish honor system. The result was a comprehensive amalgamation of precepts that structured life within the community as well as between the community and God. They did this in such a way that personal relationships, with one another and with God, included the principles of Irish honor and Christian mutuality.

Education and Catechesis

Although not every monastic settlement in Ireland conducted a school, formal education occurred primarily within the monastic setting. To gain insight into the instructional system of early Christian Ireland, this section examines the curriculum and pedagogy of the formal school setting, the student-teacher relationships, and the informal education of the sacramental life. This will highlight not only the newfound literacy, but

¹²¹ Ibid.

also an understanding of Christian faith and its possibilities to enhance the daily life of the new believers.

Curriculum in the monastic schools was extensive. While the *Tripartite Life of Patrick* credits Patrick with the introduction of the alphabet and writing,¹²² it is likely that this was a literary device to explain the synchronization of the beginning of alphabetic writing with the arrival of Christianity in Ireland. Nonetheless, an Irish pupil first learned the Latin alphabet. Next was an introduction of the first “textbook,” the *Psalter*. Once a student completed the study of the *Psalter*, a gradual introduction of other Hebrew Scriptures commenced, beginning with *Genesis*, *Isaiah* and the *Minor Prophets*, and the *Song of Solomon*.¹²³ The canonical gospels presented in the “Irish sequence” (Mt, Jn, Lk, Mk), reflect the emphasis on the *Gospel of Matthew*¹²⁴ in the Irish tradition.¹²⁵ Biblical apocrypha were also a core component of the Irish monastic curriculum, notably, the *Book of Jubilees*, the *Gospel of Peter*, and the *Gospel of James*.

The choice of texts reflects an appropriation of material that resonated with Irish culture. The Hebrew Scriptures, with their genealogies, heroic tales, and accounts of various battles as well as the poetry of the *Psalms* and *Song of Solomon* was similar to the

¹²² Kathleen Mulchrone, *Bethu Phâatraic; the Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1939), §6.

¹²³ The primary texts used in Early Ireland were the *Vetus Latina* and the *Vulgate*. Richter, “*O Quam Gravis Est Scriptura*: Early Irish Lay Society and Written Culture.”

¹²⁴ Of the forty surviving texts of Irish sermons in the *Catechesis Celtica*, it is interesting to note that a little more than one-half are devoted to the *Gospel of Matthew* with the next highest was *The Gospel of Luke* with only four texts. O’Loughlin provides the following count: Mt 21, Lk 4, Jn 3, Apoc 2, Ps 1, Gn 1, Job 1, Fasting 1, Sunday 1. Thomas O’Loughlin, “Irish Preaching before the End of the Ninth Century: Assessing the Extent of Our Evidence,” in *Irish Preaching 700-1700*, ed. Alan J. Fletcher and Raymond Gillespie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 25.

¹²⁵ Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition*, 72.

oral tales of the *filid*. In *Matthew*, the Irish found the life, ministry, and wonders of Jesus presented against a backdrop that was at the same time familiar and new. The gospel begins with a lengthy genealogy, includes numerous sayings of Jesus, and of course has the strongest link to the Hebrew Scriptures of any of the four canonical gospels.¹²⁶ The miracles of Jesus found parallels in the Irish stories of magic and divination. The Irish came to understand the lordship of Christ in relation to their own experiences of king, clients, and the social strata. Further, the ancestral practices of the *fine* provided the precedent for teaching the Christian concept “Children of God.”

The fusion of native Irish culture and Christian theology is also apparent in the Irish “Christian” compositions.¹²⁷ Although the *Vitae*, poetry, hymns, and *Loricae* present an integration of these two components, they do so with a clear sense of Christian superiority. The supernatural abilities of the holy men and women were possible not because of the favor of the pantheon of gods, but because these new “heroes” lived in an intimate relationship with the true God of the Christian faith, they could perform many wondrous deeds. Irish laws, based on the justice of the “Ruler’s Truth,” became canons that reflected the wisdom of the Torah and the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus.

The Irish did not limit formal education to religious and biblical content.

Instruction in subjects such as the classics,¹²⁸ astronomy, medicine, and music were also a

¹²⁶ A society such as early Ireland that was deeply focused on history and law (See chapter 1) held the Hebrew Scriptures in special regard because of its historical and legal aspects.

¹²⁷ See chapter 3 below for a survey of this literature.

¹²⁸ Beyond biblical and apocryphal texts, the Irish curriculum included classical works by, Vergil, Horace, Juvenal, Juvenius, Prudentius, Ausonius, Jerome, Augustine, Cyprian, Philo, and Origen.¹²⁸ Eventually the Irish began to compose their own texts, such as the numerous *vitae*, poetry, hymns, biblical glosses and apocrypha, as well as the corpus of Irish laws, and monastic community rules.

part of the curriculum of the monastic schools. The *Book of Kells* attests to the artistic skills developed in the Irish monastic setting. Although Latin was the language of scholarship in Ireland as it was on the Continent, the same schools that taught Latin also taught writing in Irish. A working knowledge of *computus* was a course of instruction that came to be, according to Daibhi Ó Crónín, “a marked feature of the Irish schools.”¹²⁹ Moreover, as Christianity became more widespread and accepted, and the Irish learned in the Christian traditions, they adapted the Eastern monastic rules and liturgical formulae to meet the needs of the Irish faithful.

How was it that Ireland transformed a predominantly pagan, non-written tribal culture into a respected Christian seat of learning? Although literacy alone is not transformative,¹³⁰ the arrival of alphabetic literacy concomitant with the introduction of the Christian faith proved to be a coincidence of strong agents of social change for the early Irish. This shift in society did not rely upon a simple choice of curricula; it was, the result of the particular educational methodology employed in the formal and informal learning environments. A survey of the key Irish pedagogical approaches displays levels of ingenuity and adaptability to meet the mode of the receiver in both content and methodology.

¹²⁹ Ó Crónín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 177.

¹³⁰ Stevenson explores the transformative aspects literacy in an orally based culture and concludes that while the normal process is one whereby writing silences native culture, in Ireland this was not the case because the native oral culture and the written Christian culture existed “in shades of grey rather than black and white.” Jan Stevenson, “Literacy and Orality in Early Medieval Ireland,” in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Doris Edel (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), 22.

The first task was to acquaint the Irish with the Latin language in order to provide access to biblical, religious, and other texts. Although access to the written world was through Latin, in Ireland “Latin grammars were useless because they presupposed a basic command of Latin”¹³¹ as well as familiarity with the Roman contexts. To compensate, Irish educators composed their own *Grammars* that present Latin vocabulary and language structure in a manner that resonated with the daily activities of Irish learners. A seventh century text, *Ars Asporii (Asperi)* reflects such adaptations. The anonymous author substituted Christian examples for the pagan examples in the text; replacing the Roman secular vocabulary with those common to the monastic life. For example, *musa* (muse) a term that would have been out of context in the Irish understanding, was replaced with *ecclesia* (church).¹³² A few centuries later, the Irish schools used a *Grammar* by Aelfric, (an Anglo Saxon), whose exercises focused on activities such as driving sheep out to pasture, guarding them from wolves, ploughing, hunting, fishing, etc.¹³³

Pedagogical companions to the practice of adaptation were memorization and oral recitation. The first text presented to learners, *The Psalms*, was a tool for memorization, a task similar to the native educational system where the memorization of genealogies and historical tales was central. The student, in the process of memorizing the text, would recite it aloud to themselves or to others. The oral component not only helped the student

¹³¹ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 175.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Kathleen Hughes and Ann Hamlin, *The Modern Traveller to the Early Irish Church* (London: S.P.C.K., 1977), 52.

learn the text more fully, it also allowed those who could not read to have access to the material. Through this, process the student learned by imitation. Hearing the text orally with cadence and intonations provided an experiential opportunity to engage the material.

Irish Christian educators also utilized other pedagogical approaches that found resonance in an oral culture, 1) the *questio*, 2) numerical groupings, 3) contextualization, and 4) exegesis. The Irish system expanded the *questio*, a method utilizing the memorization of questions and answers typically found in classical educational materials. As Celticist Ludwig Bieler states, “the answer is regularly introduced with ‘*ni annsa*’ (it is not hard) and always contains a little more than what was strictly demanded.”¹³⁴ The practice of placing key concepts into easy to remember numerical sets became a key characteristic of Irish pedagogy. A sixth century catechetical text, *The Abgitir Chrabáid* presents ethical teachings in the forms of tetrads, triads, and dyads; (e.g. the four things that obscure the truth, the three things that assail the pursuer of truth, and the two things to be guarded against in the zeal for truth).¹³⁵ Third, contextualization made the texts accessible and learning the content relevant. Irish historian Kathleen Hughes describes the efforts to contextualize the materials as

Irish masters took trouble in preparing their texts for the lecture room. Eighth and ninth century glosses show that they were trying to make certain that their classes properly understood the grammar and the allusions of the texts they were reading and did not copy or memorize in parrot fashion (...). Therefore, they often glossed their manuscripts

¹³⁴ Ludwig Bieler, "The Island of Scholars," in *Ireland and the Culture of Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Richard Sharpe (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), 226.

¹³⁵ Vernon Hull, "Apgitir Chrabaidh," *Celtica* 8 (1968): 67.

with a system of marks connecting one word with another so that Irish students could grasp the meaning more readily.¹³⁶

Finally, the students learned to analyze texts using either the Antiochene or Alexandrian methods of exegesis. The former asked the student to examine the text in a more literal manner that considered the story in its historical context, while the latter required the learner to engage the text to understand its moral and allegorical meaning. While there were those who favored one method or the other, at times, exegetes used both on a single biblical selection. By interweaving these core components of Irish teaching, the students were able to learn the Christian story in a multifaceted manner that allowed them to understand its historical origin, interrelatedness of themes and concepts, and application for their own lives.

The monastery, as the center of learning for the area of the *túath*, had an obligation to provide an education for the children of *túath*. While the monastic schools received foreign students who did not have any obligation to the monastery,¹³⁷ for the members of the *túath*, one of every seven boys was to enter the religious life as a monk or priest.¹³⁸ Yet despite this obligation, education was not limited to young boys;¹³⁹ children of both genders were educated, mirroring the native Irish fosterage system. Further, under the Christian system, women as well as men were educators and learners.

As Maeve Callan notes, of the hundreds of Irish female saints, only four

¹³⁶ Kathleen Hughes and D. N. Dumville, *Church and Society in Ireland, A.D. 400-1200* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), 74.

¹³⁷ Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, 23.

¹³⁸ John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches; a History A.D. 200 to 1200* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 74. Mytum agrees that a male child was offered to the monastery as a recruit however he states that it was the first son of the family. Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland*, 129.

¹³⁹ Hughes, "The Golden Age of Early Christian Ireland," 56.

(Darerca/Moninna, Brigit, Íte, and Samhthann) have extant *vitae* of their own, and all of these “had some involvement with literary education.”¹⁴⁰ In the *Life of St. Darerca, or Moninna, the Abbess*,¹⁴¹ Moninna received her childhood religious education from Patrick. As an adult, she educated both sexes. Her *Vita* recounts her fosterage of the future bishop Luger,¹⁴² “enlightenment” of the sisters at Ard Conais,¹⁴³ and tutelage of the female scribe Brignat who travelled to Moninna to learn “*Psalms* and other necessary books.”¹⁴⁴ Brigit was a student of Finnian of Clonard, (also a teacher of Moninna) and became connected to the “pagan Goddess of poetry and learning”¹⁴⁵ by the same name. Íte, “in her nunnery at Kileedy, kept a school for young boys, and numbered among her pupils such future leaders as Brendan of Clonfert.”¹⁴⁶ Samhthann educated her foster son, an unnamed future abbot. Daircellach sought her out for study, because she was a “pious teacher of the lowly.”¹⁴⁷ In addition to these examples, numerous other hagiographical materials present the early Irish educational system as coeducational in both its teachers and students.

¹⁴⁰ Maeve B. Callan, "St. Darerca and Her Sister Scholars: Women and Education in Medieval Ireland," *Gender and History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 32-34.

¹⁴¹ Conchubranus, "The Life of St Darerca, or Moninna the Abbess," in *St. Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*, ed. Liam De Paor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996).

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 282.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 285.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 289.

¹⁴⁵ Callan, "St. Darerca and Her Sister Scholars," 41.

¹⁴⁶ McNeill, *The Celtic Churches; a History A.D. 200 to 1200*, 79.

¹⁴⁷ "Life of the Holy Virgin Samthann," in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head, *Garland Reference Library of the Humanities* (New York: Garland 2000).§ 24-25.

The relationship between teacher and learner was one that, like that of the child placed in fosterage under the old system, became quite intimate. Generally, the learning process occurred in a one-on-one manner with a solitary student and master. Often, when a master traveled, the student accompanied him/her and learned as they went along their way.¹⁴⁸ These travels allowed the student to learn by imitation of the master as well as by didactic instruction. In the learning journey not only was the relationship between theory and praxis made explicit, the bonds between master and student became so close that students often assumed the care of their teachers in their old age.

Thus far, the concentration has been the formal educational models in the medieval Irish system. Education occurred in informal settings as well—especially in the area of catechetics.¹⁴⁹ As noted above, the Church and the inhabitants of the *túath* entered into a contractual-like relationship. The people provided the church with support and, in turn, the Church provided access to the sacraments, spiritual guidance, and instruction in faith. Remember also that the laity had a right to have the word of God proclaimed “to all who would hear it.”¹⁵⁰ Should negligence on the part of either the laity or the church occur, the matter became a civil legal issue.

The legality of the educational relationship ensured that the education of the monastic school setting continued beyond the student years into the life of a believer

¹⁴⁸ MacManus, *The Story of the Irish Race: A Popular History of Ireland*, 218.

¹⁴⁹ The following is a description of the processes of the informal educational activities, the discussion of their content occurs below in chapter 3.

¹⁵⁰ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 71.

through participation in the sacramental life, as well as through spiritual direction.¹⁵¹

Although the Latin was the language of the liturgy, preaching was in Irish. According to Irish theologian Thomas O'Loughlin, the purpose of the sermon was to be "direct instruction, which is seen as the means of exhorting listeners using a 'know ... then do' strategy rather than by any attempt to capture their attention with a narrative or with well developed images."¹⁵² Therefore, to be effective, the sermon linked the religious themes of the tradition to actions that were possible for the listener who desired to live the ideals of the Christian life.

As for the sacramental life of the believer, the frequency of the reception of certain sacraments such as Eucharist or Confirmation is unclear.¹⁵³ Baptism, as the primary Rite of Initiation, was often the first contact with the new believer. The baptism of children required a period of instruction for the parents and sponsors of the child.¹⁵⁴

The texts provide clear information concerning the reception of the Sacrament of

¹⁵¹ I am unaware of any texts describing the form of spiritual direction other than a brief allusion in the *Abgitir Chrabáid*. Therefore I shall confine my discussion to the preaching at liturgy and the sacramental opportunities especially baptism and penance.

¹⁵² O'Loughlin, "Irish Preaching before the End of the Ninth Century: Assessing the Extent of Our Evidence," 60. The Council of Clofesho held in 747, when describing the ministry of the priesthood in *Canons 8-12*, refers at three separate instances to the responsibility of the priest for teaching the laity. Cubitt, "Pastoral Care and Conciliar Canons: The Provisions of the 747 Council of Clofesho," 196.

¹⁵³ Sharpe states that "it is not easy to find examples of its [Confirmation] happening." Sharpe, "Churches and Communities in Early Medieval Ireland: Towards a Pastoral Model," 81. Further, reception of the Eucharist by the laity is a grey area. The seventh century *Vita S. Columba* makes mention of the presider and clergy entering the church for Eucharist after the readings and sermon outside the church building. Whether this was standard practice at larger churches of the period as well is unknown. Adamnan, J. T. Fowler, and William Reeves, *Adamnani Vita S. Columbae* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press; reprint, 1894), III, 17.

¹⁵⁴ *Canon 11* of the Council of Clofesho, 747, CE as found in Cubitt, "Pastoral Care and Conciliar Canons: The Provisions of the 747 Council of Clofesho," 196.

Penance.¹⁵⁵ The Irish developed the then-new form of private confession that was “not accompanied by the stiff life-long penalties associated with public penance”¹⁵⁶ as was the practice of the Continental Church. The guidelines recorded in the *Penitentials* advise the confessor to be mindful of the circumstances of the sin and the disposition of the penitent when assigning a penance. John Walsh notes,

Once memorized, this material would also assist the confessor in the essential interrogation and possible education of the penitent to ensure that he had confessed all of his serious sins and simultaneously was instructed about the nature of sin.¹⁵⁷

For the Irish, penance was an opportunity for healing rather than punishment, with the understanding that the medicinal value of confession was to heal not only the individual soul of the penitent but an exhortation to modify behaviors that injured the community. In fact, absolution was not given until after the performance of the prescribed acts of satisfaction.¹⁵⁸

Both the content and methodology used in early Irish formal and informal educational settings allowed for adaptation from the Græco-Roman instructional model to that which resonated with the native Irish culture. This familiarity allowed for an understanding of primary religious concepts, and the stories that communicated them in a familiar way to foster a synthesis between faith and life. The early Irish pedagogical approach proved to be a more effective evangelization tool than the usurpation of an

¹⁵⁵ Again, an in-depth discussion follows below in chapter 3.

¹⁵⁶ John R. Walsh and Thomas Bradley, *A History of the Irish Church: 400-700 AD*, 1st ed. (Blackrock: Columba Press, 1991), 113.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 114.

¹⁵⁸ The current practice of offering absolution at the time of confession did not become the norm until the eleventh century. Ibid.

accepted worldview with methodologies and ideas that were foreign, abstract, and primarily theoretical.

Conclusion

The early Irish Church developed slowly. Unlike the experience of the Church in Rome where Christianity gained a footing through imperial decree, in Ireland this movement emerged from activities within communities. As Irish Christianity matured, it conceived diverse understandings of the Church and its role(s) in society. Through the examination of the laws, monastic communities, and educational system, it now becomes possible to see that the early Irish Church was one of inculturation—an enmeshment with Irish society rather than a setting apart. Conversion for the Irish was not a matter of intellectual assent to a new philosophy or ethereal religion. It was the result of successful evangelization efforts that presented orthodox doctrine via a pedagogical approach inclusive of both the high regard for the education of the laity and respect for the native culture. To become a Christian in Early Ireland was to embrace a way of life that was at once familiar and new.

CHAPTER 3: EARLY IRISH CHRISTIAN FAITH - CONTENT AND PRACTICE

Introduction

At this point of the study, it is appropriate to turn to the content upon which early Irish Church relied for catechetical instruction. This chapter surveys a selection of extant texts that either emerged from or were held in high esteem by the early Irish Church with particular attention to their christological and ecclesiological attributes. I bring to the fore images and understandings that illuminate how the early Irish Church received, interpreted, and practiced its newfound Christian faith.

The Christian Story

Christianity is a “religion of the book.” Its introduction to the Irish was concomitant with the introduction of alphabetic writing and reading in Ireland. As Christianity spread and flourished, Irish scholars became renowned as biblical copyists and exegetes. In this section, I offer a general survey of the exegetical activity of early Christian Ireland, in order to lay a foundational understanding of the *fides receptus*.

Bible

The Bible in early Christian Ireland, as elsewhere, was not uniform. Jerome’s *Vulgate*, written in the late fourth/early fifth century, became the favored edition of the Bible, yet its prominence did not eliminate the use of the *Vetus Latina* (Old Latin) version.¹ While Irish tradition credits Finnian with introducing the *Vulgate* to Ireland,²

¹ Philip Burton notes “Although we have talked in terms of a division between the ‘Old Latin’ and ‘Vulgate’ translations, it should be noted that this division is in practice not such a neat one. The Vulgate Gospels were, as Jerome states, intended to be a minimal revision of the existing Old Latin versions, and do bear a strong resemblance to them.” Philip Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels :A Study of Their Texts and Language*, *Oxford Early Christian Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6. The *Vulgate* is prominent in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, the *Antiphonary of Bangor*, and, for the most part, in the works of Columbanus and Adomnán. The *Vetus Latina* on the other hand, can be found in the writings of Patrick and in the sixth/seventh century wax tablets found in the Springmount Bog, Co. Antrim in 1913. Finally, the seventh century *Liber ex lege Moysis* includes the *Vulgate*, *Vulgate* variants and ten *Vetus*

evidence for use of the *Vetus Latina* remains as late as the eighth century;³ nearly two centuries after Finnian's death.

Given the Irish predilection for taxonomy and numerical groupings, it is not surprising that the Irish divided the Bible into sections. They retained the traditional categories of the *Old Testament* (Law, Prophets, and Writings) but classified the *Psalms* as "prophecy since they prophesied about Christ and of the *New Testament*."⁴ The *New Testament* was divided into what the *Stowe Missal* terms "the octonary *New Testament*":⁵ the four *Gospels*, *Acts*, Catholic Epistles, Pauline Epistles, and the *Apocalypse*. Further, the Gospels themselves "were thought of as a collective quaternary," a fourfold book⁶ within the Bible.

Commentaries

Irish exegesis was a hallmark of the early Irish Church. Exegetes often wrote anonymously and the works were initially untitled with the later titles derived either from

Latina texts. Próinséas Ní Chatháin, "Early Ireland and Western Christendom: The Bible and Missions," in *Irland Und Die Christenheit : Bibelstudien Und Mission*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, *Veröffentlichungen Des Europa Zentrums Tübingen. Kulturwissenschaftliche Reihe* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 474-475.

² Martin McNamara, *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution* (Dublin :: Dominican Pubns., 1976).

³ We cannot date Irish biblical studies from the time of Palladius because, as Michael Richter notes, "The study of the bible would have been an integral part of Christianity from its very beginning. In Ireland texts date only from the seventh century onwards; this means that there are about two centuries unaccounted for[...]." Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, 184.

⁴ Martin McNamara, *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*, ed. John Jarick, vol. 165, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 397. The christological emphasis of the *Psalms* discussed below under Theodore of Mopsuestia.

⁵ Ní Chatháin, "Early Ireland and Western Christendom: The Bible and Missions," 479.

⁶ Ní Chatháin notes "Matthew's Gospel appears to have been especially favoured." Ibid, 477.

the contents or the opening words.⁷ The Irish exegetical approach⁸ was primarily Alexandrian, except for the *Psalms* where the Antiochene method prevailed.⁹ Irish writers nuanced the field of exegesis by adding “the rendering of a word in the ‘three languages,’ namely Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, in which the title of the Cross of Christ was written, and for that reason were esteemed as the ‘holy languages’.”¹⁰ This trilingual attempt often was a simple transliteration of a Latin word in Greek and Hebrew. Nonetheless, it displays the Irish inquisitiveness and appreciation of the text-critical approach to the Bible.

There were two prominent biblical commentaries written in Ireland during the period under study here,¹¹ the *Catechesis celtica*¹² and *Das Bibelwerk* (Reference Bible).¹³ *Das Bibelwerk* is an eighth century text that reflects the oral teachings of Irish schools.¹⁴ More of an encyclopedic companion to the Bible, it employs both a question

⁷ In some cases the titles used today are those given a text by contemporary editors and scholars e.g. *Das Bibelwerk* is so named by Bernhard Bischoff. Bernhard Bischoff, "Wendepunkte in Der Geschichte Der Lateinschen Exegese Im Frühmittelalter," *Sacris Erudir* 6 (1954). The same text McNamara refers to as *The Reference Bible*. McNamara, *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, 88.

⁸ Here of course I refer to the Antiochene and Alexandrian exegetical methods with the former generally a more literal understanding while the latter perceived the biblical texts in a more allegorical manner.

⁹ Due in part to the dependence upon Theodore of Mopsuestia.

¹⁰ McNamara, *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, 85.

¹¹ McNamara provides an index of the exegetical literature of the period, *Ibid*, 95-149.

¹² While the *Catechesis celtica* is a text similar to the form of biblical commentary, its style lends itself to a homiletic text and therefore I treat it below under *Sermons and Homilies*.

¹³ Ever since Bischoff's *Wendepunkte* appeared, scholars have hotly debated his criteria of the "Irish symptoms" for classifying a text including *Das Bibelwerk* as Irish. The latest opinion (although certainly not the last) word on the subject leans favorably towards Bischoff and therefore I include *Das Bibelwerk* here as an Irish commentary. For full treatment of the debate see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, "Bischoff's *Wendepunkte* Fifty Years On," *Revue Bénédictine* 110, no. 2/3 (2000).

¹⁴ MacGinty, "The Irish Pentateuch of the Reference Bible: The Problem Concerning Its Sources," 163.

and answer format and a continuous exposition of the text.¹⁵ While *Das Bibelwerk* provides commentary on all of the books in the Bible, it does not address each text in its entirety; despite lengthy attention to *Genesis*, the treatment of the *New Testament* is three times larger than that of the *Old Testament*.¹⁶ The writers drew from a variety of sources including the Jewish historian Flavius as well patristic writers such as Origen, Ambrose, Augustine, Cassian, Gregory the Great, Jerome, Theodore, and Pelagius. Gerard MacGinty provides us with a concise description of the work as a whole,

I do not judge that it is *intended* to be a synthesis, but rather a collection of comments and reflections drawn from different sources, with no attempt to ensure mutual coherence. If Jerome said one thing and Augustine another, well they are both authorities and they said different things [...]. I have come to believe we are to understand the summary manner of its patristic references, indeed understand the very nature of the text, as rather unevenly developed lecture notes.¹⁷

The use of *Das Bibelwerk* together with the *Catechesis celtica* as homiletic and catechetical material provides insight into the role of the Scriptures in the early Irish Church. Along with the *patres*,¹⁸ biblical accounts provided the narrative of the new faith; a narrative accessible to the reader and the hearer, the student and the worshipper, because it also resonated with the Irish *filid* tradition of ancestral narratives.

Acceptable Heretics? Theodore of Mopsuestia and Pelagius in Ireland

At a time when the greater Church experienced the “Dark Ages,” biblical exegesis in Ireland is notable for not only the volume of work, but also for the Irish use of

¹⁵ McNamara, *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, 98.

¹⁶ Joseph F. Kelly, “Hiberno-Latin Theology,” in *Die Iren Und Europa Im Früheren Mittelalter*, ed. Heinz Löwe (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), 557.

¹⁷ MacGinty, “The Irish Pentateuch of the Reference Bible: The Problem Concerning Its Sources,” 165.

¹⁸ The Irish referred to the Church Fathers as the *patres*.

Theodore of Mopsuestia and Pelagius, both denounced by the Church as heretics. While today Theodore has not captured the popular attention, the thrust in contemporary literature seeking to “reclaim” Irish or Celtic spirituality often emphasizes the connection between Pelagius and Ireland. Yet the Irish are responsible for the preservation of Theodore’s writings.¹⁹ Together this links between Theodore, Pelagius, and Ireland raises speculation concerning the orthodoxy of the early Irish Church, a concern not borne out under examination. I propose that like Theodore, “the Irish saw Pelagius primarily as an exegete.”²⁰

Theodore of Mopsuestia’s Commentary on the Psalms

Theodore (ca. 350-428) was born in Antioch, Syria to a wealthy and politically active family. He, together with his friend John Chrysostom, was a student of Diodore, the bishop of Tarsus and proponent (if not founder) of the Antiochene method of exegesis. Theodore was ordained a priest in his native Antioch and eventually was elevated to bishop of Mopsuestia. He authored many biblical commentaries beginning with his *Commentary on the Psalms* (written between 368 and 392 CE)²¹ earning him the title “*Mephasqana*” (The Interpreter).²² His *Commentary on the Psalms*, particularly on

¹⁹ Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, 185. see also McNamara, *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, 78.

²⁰ Joseph F. Kelly, "Pelagius, Pelagianism and the Early Christian Irish," *Mediaevalia* 4 (1978): 116.

²¹ Robert L. Ramsay, "Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. Columban on the Psalms," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 8, no. 1910/1911 (1912): 421.

²² As Robert Hill explains, The title *Mephasqana* was well established by the late sixth century among Eastern Syriac churches, according to the text of their synod of 596.” Robert C. Hill, "His Master's Voice: Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Psalms," *Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004): 40. See also Harry S. Pappas, "Theodore of Mopsuestia's Commentary on Psalm 44 (Lxx): A Study of Exegesis and Christology," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47, no. 1-4 (2002): 55 n53.

Psalms 8, 15, 21, and 68,²³ as well as his struggle with προσοπον (person) in *Psalms* 44,²⁴ led to accusations of Nestorian christological views and his posthumous anathematization at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, CE.²⁵

Following Diodore, Theodore rejected the *Psalms* headings found in both the LXX and the original Hebrew texts.²⁶ Further, as a student of Diodore and an exegete in the Antiochene style, he emphasized the historical rather than the allegorical sense of scripture. This is not to say that Theodore (or the Antiochenes) did not allow for a spiritual interpretation (*theoria*)²⁷ of the biblical texts, rather, as Robert Ramsay observes, “room is provided, even in Theodore for a spiritual or mystical sense. But, with the exception of the four psalms mentioned above [2, 8, 44, 109] it is always subordinate and very restricted in use.”²⁸ For Theodore, there were four interwoven exegetical senses: a double historical sense followed by the spiritual (*theoria*) and moral ones. First, because the *Psalms* were the writings of an historical person, David,²⁹ the first approach to them must be a consideration of the historical setting of the author. Second, because David was an author also considered a prophet, his prophecies (which Theodore believed

²³ LXX numbering.

²⁴ Pappas, "Theodore of Mopsuestia's Commentary on Psalm 44 (Lxx): A Study of Exegesis and Christology," 65.

²⁵ The anathematization expressed in Council's *Constitutum* of Vigilius A *Constitutum* is a papal proclamation. "The condemnation expressly included passages from his commentary on the psalms [sic]." Ramsay, "Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. Columban on the Psalms," 423.

²⁶ Hill, "His Master's Voice: Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Psalms," 46.

²⁷ "On the other hand θεωρία refers to the spiritual meaning of Scriptures in Antiochene spiritual circles." Pappas, "Theodore of Mopsuestia's Commentary on Psalm 44 (Lxx): A Study of Exegesis and Christology," 60.

²⁸ Ramsay, "Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. Columban on the Psalms," 434.

²⁹ Theodore did not question the Davidic authorship of the *Psalms*. Ibid: 431.

pertained to Hezekiah, the people of faith in general, or the Maccabees)³⁰ were key in Theodore's system for understanding the text. The third approach, the spiritual sense, is a "typical reference to Christ"³¹ or "the earthly and heavenly church."³² Finally, he attends to the moral message of the text, which has direct bearing upon the lives of the believers.

Theodore was unique in his exegetical work because of his position that, while other *Psalms* may *allude* to a christological typology, only four *Psalms* (2, 8, 10, 44) contained *direct* messianic references that he termed, "dogmatic."³³ Dogma became an issue for Theodore posthumously as his title changed from "The Interpreter" to "The Eastern Pelagius"³⁴ because, like other Antiochene theologians, he upheld the goodness of human nature. His commentary on Psalm 51 led to this transition from *patre* to heretic,

Because I know that my iniquity, and my sin is always before me. (v3)
He [David] brought out that it was right for him to beg forgiveness of sins, acknowledging the fact of his sinning, he cites acknowledgement of falling as no slight grounds for salvation. But he [David] does not

³⁰ Robert L. Ramsay, "Theodore of Mopsuestia in England and Ireland " *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 8, no. 1910-1911 (1912): 467.

³¹ Ramsay, "Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. Columban on the Psalms," 435. See also McNamara, *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*, 95.

³² Ramsay, "Theodore of Mopsuestia in England and Ireland ": 467.

³³ Ramsay, "Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. Columban on the Psalms," 436.

³⁴ Photius, *Bibliotheca* ([cited 30 April 2008]); available from http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/photius_copyright/photius_04bibliotheca.htm#177. According to Kelly the title is due more to Theodore's Eastern social location than to his theological perspective. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (New York NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), 372-373.

use acknowledgement in the same sense as knowing sin as a fact (it being common to almost all human beings) [...].

Theodore *Commentary on Psalm 51*³⁵

While it appears here that Theodore questions the universality of Original Sin, he does not, as Robert Hill notes, deny the consequences of the Fall, “[t] here seems in the comment on *Psalm 35:5* an implicit acceptance of its [Original Sin] truth.”³⁶ Acceptance of Original Sin while upholding the goodness of creation distinguishes Theodore from Pelagius and Pelagianism.

Yet, it was not his theology of nature, but his Christology, specifically his use of *προσωπον* (person), that led to Theodore’s anathematization.³⁷ In his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Theodore uses *προσωπον* as an exegetical term to identify the person or role of David³⁸ before examining the topic or theme (*υποθεσις*) attached to the person through the logic (*ακαλουθια*) of the text. All three components, *προσωπον* (person), *υποθεσις* (topic), and *ακαλουθια* (logic) serve to provide a “narrative context for the Incarnation,”³⁹ the heart of Theodore’s exegetical efforts. As Harry Pappas notes, there are five christological components of Theodore’s exegesis of *Psalm 44*; components that I

³⁵ Theodore, *Commentary on Psalms 1-81*, ed. Robert C. Hill (Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

³⁶ Ibid, xxxv.

³⁷ The accusations of Nestorism and the *Three Chapters Controversy* are not salient to our purposes here therefore I confine my comments to those theological points of Theodore that resonate with this study of Theodore in Ireland.

³⁸ Pappas distinguishes between the exegetical and the theological uses by situating the exegetical use as a component of narrative analysis demonstrated by Theodore’s use of the term “in his opening comments on each psalm” clearly referring to David or a speaker on David’s behalf rather than a metaphysical term. Pappas, “Theodore of Mopsuestia’s Commentary on Psalm 44 (Lxx): A Study of Exegesis and Christology,” entire esp 60-66.

³⁹ Ibid: 70.

propose apply generally to Theodore's approach to the *Psalter* as a whole and to the other three messianic *Psalms* in particular. The components are, in short,

1. Doctrine arises from careful interpretation of the narrative text of Scripture.
2. Scripture speaks of the Incarnate Lord as one
3. Scripture speaks of the Incarnation as a narrative rather than any particular historical event,
4. When Scripture distinguishes between the divine and human in Christ, it follows the basic distinction between the uncreated and the created.
5. He [Theodore] attempts to resolve this dilemma in his Christology by using the category of a single honor. In turn, this honor implies that Theodore wants to describe the union in Christ by using the dynamic analogy of grace, rather than the more static analogy of a metaphysical union of body and soul in a human person.⁴⁰

Theodore's *Commentary on the Psalms* is an example of unity: of the biblical narratives, salvation history, and of Christ. Understood in this manner, the presence and preservation of Theodore in early Christian Ireland was not a turn to heretical material. It was simply the utilization of a then orthodox text that aided in the understanding of the *Bible*, the new faith, and Christ.

Pelagius' Commentary on Romans

Historians generally agree that Pelagius was a Briton born in the late fourth century who came to Rome between 382 and 385 CE⁴¹ where he lived until 410CE.⁴² He was not ordained a priest, but was a monk known for his moderate asceticism.⁴³ During

⁴⁰ Ibid: 72.

⁴¹ Kelly, "Pelagius, Pelagianism and the Early Christian Irish," 101.

⁴² Peter Brown, "Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment," *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968): 94.

⁴³ Theodore de Bruyn, ed., *Pelagius's Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, *Oxford Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 10.

his time in Rome, he gained popularity as a teacher of the Roman aristocracy and, through his teaching activities; he came to write several biblical commentaries, most notably on Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* (his largest extant work).

Pelagius's teaching on the role of human cooperation in the attainment of salvation became the center of conflict with two powerful Church authorities, Jerome and Augustine.⁴⁴ In his *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, Pelagius "distances himself from those at Rome who favour the African tradition on the consequences of the fall,"⁴⁵ most pointedly Augustine. Because of his disagreement with Augustine and Jerome over the doctrine of Original Sin, the Council of Carthage (418 CE) denounced Pelagius exiling him from Italy. Although the records are silent concerning the man after this date, his teachings, known as "Pelagianism," remained problematic until the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE where the Church condemned Pelagianism and its followers.

While Pelagianism reached a peak in between 390 and 410,⁴⁶ vestiges remained in 429 CE⁴⁷ when Pope Celestine dispatched Germanus to combat the heresy in Britain. Despite the close proximity to Britain, Pelagianism appears not to have influenced the

⁴⁴ Augustine and Jerome accused Pelagius of denying the universality of Original Sin as a consequence of the Fall because he upheld the goodness of human nature and the capability of persons to contribute to their salvation. Martha Storz writes that Jerome's animosity towards Pelagius was heightened because Jerome was "certain that Pelagius' supporters had burned down his monasteries in Bethlehem [and he] spared the monk no censure." Martha Ellen Stortz, "Pelagius Revisited," *Word and World* 8, no. 2 (1988): 134.

⁴⁵ See especially the commentary on *Romans* 5:15. de Bruyn, ed., *Pelagius's Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, 7.

⁴⁶ Brown, "Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment," 98.

⁴⁷ See chapter 1

Irish Church.⁴⁸ For the Irish, Pelagius was of importance as an exegete among other exegetes. *Das Bibelwerk* and the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* draw from Pelagius and cite him by name.⁴⁹ Irish theologian Joseph Kelly notes, “The Irish used the orthodox Fathers alongside Pelagius side by side, literally. [...] Nowhere was Pelagius used to the exclusion of the orthodox Fathers.”⁵⁰

Pelagius’ exegetical method was literal (in the style of the Antiochene school)⁵¹ with “regard to the law, [but he] favoured allegory or figurative interpretations to explain narratives that [he] disliked.”⁵² Two theological views that resound in his *Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* are:

1) A strong anti-Manichean position that raises up “the goodness of creation, the capacity of all human beings to choose between good and evil [...] and the accounting for that capacity in God’s plan of salvation.”⁵³ “Instruction and example are for Pelagius the chief ways in which salvation is communicated and corresponds to the human ability to know and to act accordingly to God’s will.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ A close reading of some Irish texts including those by Columba demonstrate subtle hints of Pelagianist views on free will and Original Sin; however, it would be an overstatement to state that the Irish Church perpetuated Pelagianism. A more reasonable explanation for these traces in the Irish texts would be the presence of Pelagius’ exegetical works together with those of the orthodox Fathers in the prominent Irish commentaries.

⁴⁹ as *Pelagius ait* and *Pilagius*. Kelly, “Pelagius, Pelagianism and the Early Christian Irish,” 108, 112.

⁵⁰ Ibid: 115-116.

⁵¹ Although link between Pelagius and Antioch is not clear. de Bruyn, ed., *Pelagius’s Commentary on St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, 3-4.

⁵² Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity : Britain and Ireland from the Fifth to the Tenth Century, Studies in Celtic History*, 20 (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2002), 93.

⁵³ de Bruyn, ed., *Pelagius’s Commentary on St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, 16.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 37-38.

2) An “insistence that the full code of Christian behaviour, the Christian *Lex*, should be imposed in all its rigours on every baptized member of the Catholic Church; there is one law for all.”⁵⁵

Salvation for Pelagius is intricately linked to creation and the Law. He wrote that

“[N]othing is more becoming for the creator than to care for the salvation of his creatures [...]” (Rm 1:16)⁵⁶

“And what should be less of an obligation than [...] that the creator of the universe should be hanged on behalf of his creatures?” (Rm 5:8)⁵⁷

Theodore de Bruyn opines that in a Pelagian view of the salvific movement of God in Christ, “The Christian [is] to be holy [because] of the love which God has shown in Christ.”⁵⁸ Holiness manifested by adherence to the Law, which reveals the will of God for humanity, is the requisite response of the believer. For Pelagius, the relationship between God and humanity revealed through Christ is a covenantal relationship in which both God in Christ and humanity have mutual responsibilities towards each other.

“The Irish did not formulate a theology of Scripture,”⁵⁹ writes Joseph Kelly, which prompts one to question, “Why did Pelagius and Theodore of Mopsuestia gained such a strong foothold in Irish exegetical works?” and What (if any) effect they had upon early Irish beliefs?” There is no evidence that Pelagianism (or Nestorianism) *per se* greatly influenced the early Irish Church. The best explanation for the occurrence of Pelagian and Theodoran references in Irish exegetical texts is that these were two

⁵⁵ Brown, “Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment,” 102.

⁵⁶ Theodore, *Commentary on Psalms 1-81*.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ de Bruyn, ed., *Pelagius's Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, 40.

⁵⁹ Kelly, “Hiberno-Latin Theology,” 560.

exegetes whose works probably arrived in Ireland at an early date⁶⁰ and whom the early Irish commentators consulted (among others). Further, the Irish use and preservation of the writings of both Theodore and Pelagius may have been the result of interpersonal connections between the two men that, in the minds of the Irish exegetes joined the works in theology and importance.⁶¹ In either event, the influence upon early Irish theology appears to have been primarily exegetical with an eye toward incarnational spirituality and discipleship, none of which can substantiate a heterodox charge against the early Irish Church.

Early Irish Theology

The Christology of Patrick

In this section, I turn to the Christology of the early Irish Church through the lens of the premier Irish Christian, Patrick. Although there are other early Irish writers⁶² that we could turn toward to provide a window into the beliefs of the early Irish Church, it is Patrick who, as the “matrix of [...] Irish Christian heritage,”⁶³ is the foundation from whom these later writers flow. Therefore, his *Confessio* and the *Epistula* are the primary texts examined because they capture the Christology of the early Irish Church.

⁶⁰ Richter suggests that Theodore’s *Commentary on the Psalms* arrived in Ireland before the Council of 553 that anathematized the man and his works. Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, 186.

⁶¹ McNamara notes that “Pelagius may have become acquainted with the teaching of Theodore through his contact with Rufinus the Syrian who had come from Bethlehem to Rome in 399. A closer link between Pelagianism and Theodore was forged through Julian, Bishop of Eclanum, who when expelled from his see because of Pelagian teaching in 418 lived for some time with Theodore and Nestorius in Constantinople. Julian was a systematic exponent of Pelagianism and in his exegesis followed the Antiochene school.” McNamara, *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*, 92.

⁶² Columba, Columbanus, Blathmac, and Finnian to name a few.

⁶³ Máire de Paor, *Patrick, the Pilgrim Apostle of Ireland: St. Patrick's Confessio and Epistola* (Dublin: Veritas, 1998), 211.

Irish historian Liam DePaor states that Patrick's writings emphasize the divinity of Christ demonstrating his opposition to the Arianist heresy.⁶⁴ However, while Patrick indeed upheld the divinity, he placed an equal yet distinct emphasis on Christ's humanity. It is my contention that Patrick, writing after Chalcedon in 451, wished to present a Christology that was familiar in tone to the native Irish culture, yet at the same time faithful to the Councils of Nicæa and Chalcedon. The Christology that Patrick brought to the Irish was orthodox; communicated in a practical fashion that the people of Ireland could not only identify with but could emulate, rather than in the christological jargon of the theological debates.

In order to appreciate the texts, it is helpful to situate Patrick's era within the context of the scope of church history, including its leaders, controversies, and councils. As I noted in the chapters, the late fourth and fifth centuries marked a time of change for the Church and for the world. The Roman Empire was fracturing and in sharp decline as it became the focus for attacks by the Visigoths, Vandals, and Barbarians. By contrast, the authoritarian stance of the Church was rising as efforts to consolidate beliefs and eliminate heresies (especially christological heresies).

The Church held synods and councils to parse the identity of the Christ. On the one hand, there were the Arians and Nestorians who placed an over-emphasis on the humanity of Christ, while, at the other extreme, the Appolinarians, Eutychians, and Monophysites with unbalanced emphasis on Christ's divinity. As new controversies emerged, Church authorities convened repeatedly to consider the variants in the

⁶⁴ Ibid, 9, and Diarmuid Ó Laoghaire, "Irish Spirituality," in *Irland Und Europa : Die Kirche Im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Pröinsèas nì Chathàin and Michael Richter (Stuggart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 79.

christological schemas against the orthodox creedal formula agreed upon at Nicæa in 325 CE. The purpose of this flurry of activity was two-fold: to eliminate those concepts that were in opposition to Nicæa and to prevent (or reconcile) schisms within the Church.⁶⁵

What was the Christology that Patrick taught and preached? The Patrician texts, the *Confessio*⁶⁶ and *Epistula ad Croticus*,⁶⁷ provide a lens to understand not only Patrick's christological position but also his catechetical efforts. In the shorter of the two, *Epistula*, Patrick writes quickly in horrified anger and grief at the news of the execution of those whom he recently baptized. Despite the brevity of the text, Patrick adeptly castigates the soldiers of Croticus for their bloodthirsty actions and, at the same time, he offers spiritual chastisement. In Patrick's view, Christ will adjudicate their actions, which he compares to Eve, giving "death to her husband" (*Epis.* 13). He does not offer this sentiment lightly. Patrick reminds the soldiers of the Christian covenantal ethos that they breached by succumbing to avarice, covetousness, hatred, and murder⁶⁸ (*Epis.* 9). Due to their evil actions, which violate the Christian law of love, Patrick declares that they shall suffer not only death but also eternal damnation for their actions (*Epis.* 4, 8, 14). The martyred neophytes, on the other hand, have "left this world to go to Paradise," (*Epis.* 17) where they will rejoice and reign with the prophets, apostles, and martyrs. (*Epis.* 17-18)

⁶⁵ This two-fold emphasis is evident in Prosper's *Consular Chronicle*. Prosper Aquitane, "Consular Chronicle," in *St. Patrick's World*, ed. Liam De Paor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996).

⁶⁶ Patrick, "Confessio."

⁶⁷ Patrick, "Epistula Ad Croticus," in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Oliver Davies, *Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

⁶⁸ Here Patrick paraphrases Rm 13:9-10.

While the *Epistula* addressed the soteriological role of Christ, it does not delve into the person of Christ as understood by Patrick. For that, one must turn to the longer text, the *Confessio*. Confessions, as a genre of religious writing preceded Patrick, and served a variety of purposes. They were a 1) *confessio peccati* - *Penitential* discipline, 2) *confessio laudis* - in praise of God, and 3) *confessio fidei*⁶⁹ - confession of faith of martyrs before a tribunal. Patrick's confession integrates both the *confessio laudis* and *fidei*. Like Augustine, Patrick's *Confessio* is a spiritual biography that demonstrates the grace of God working in his life.⁷⁰ Not only does the work combat the heresies of Arianism and the native paganism, it also is a self-defense against serious charges levied towards his character and mission. (*Conf.* 26-27, 37, 46, 51-53). Patrick offers as evidence of his innocence his experience of the saving hand of Christ, each time he faced physical and spiritual threats. For Patrick, because of his true faith in Christ, divine grace rescued him. (*Conf.* 35). (Figure 14)

Patrick's initial call to his mission (*Conf.*23), as well as many of the rescues/blessings occurs because of an intimacy with Christ that he achieved through prayer, dreams, and visions. The mystical experiences in which Christ points him to physical safety and (re)establishes Patrick's spiritual welfare, are interactions with the divine Christ who not only personally directs Patrick but also orders the universe,

⁶⁹ Also known as a *depositio*, it was normally by those who were under persecution and faced martyrdom however it extended in the fourth and fifth centuries to denote those who defended against heresy as in the case of Augustine of Hippo. de Paor, *Patrick, the Pilgrim Apostle of Ireland: St. Patrick's Confessio and Epistola*, 9.

⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion of the similarities between Augustine and Patrick see Daniel Conneely, Thomas Finan, and Patrick Bastable, *St. Patrick's Letters: A Study of Their Theological Dimension* (Maigh Nuad: Sagart, 1993).

including the cosmos.⁷¹ In his anguishing temptation by Satan, Patrick cries out to the prophet Elijah. This reference to Elijah provides the basis for Patrick's claim that "when the sun's splendor fell on me" (*Conf.*20) God rescued him.⁷²

The imagery of the sun here is not accidental. Native Irish religion included sun worship,⁷³ a belief with which Patrick as a slave in Ireland was familiar. Now the teacher, he began with these familiar religious and societal concepts,⁷⁴ then slowly drew the Irish converts forward into more mature aspects of Christian belief. Drawing upon Scripture,⁷⁵ the Fathers,⁷⁶ and papal correspondence,⁷⁷ Patrick carefully weaves an image of Christ that transforms the native Irish sun worship into a recognition of Christ as the "True Sun" (*Conf.*60) who rightly deserves their worship and maintains a positive relationship with the created world. This *sol verus*, was the light of Christ and for Patrick comes, not to show up or illuminate the deformity of a fallen world, but rather to release a beautiful and holy world from bondage, most of all to release the human person, body and soul

⁷¹ As opposed to the "creature Christ" of Arius. Note that Patrick does not make use of the Logos terminology explicitly but the Logos ideology runs throughout the text of the *Confessio*.

⁷² Patrick may be making reference to the battle of Elijah with the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel especially 1 *Kings* 18:24 where the priests called upon the "god who answers by fire" as opposed to the one true God of Elijah. Here Patrick would see a parallel between the spiritual battles of Elijah and his own evangelization efforts among peoples who worshipped the sun.

⁷³ See chapter 1 for a discussion of Daghdha as god of the sun.

⁷⁴ Even including the Roman image of the *sol invictus*.

⁷⁵ Mal4:2, Eph5:4, and Rv1:16, 22:5 as well as the Johannine "light of the world" imagery.

⁷⁶ Clement of Alexandria *Protrepticus* 9.84, Cyprian *Epistle to Donatus* Letter 1 PL 4 #35, and Ambrose *Commentary on the Psalms* 118 [119]

⁷⁷ Leo the Great *Epistle to Theodoret* CXX

from bondage and to dissipate the shadows that lie across all creation through the presence of the enemy and his dark angels.⁷⁸

These images of Christ as Judge, Creator, Protector, and True Sun, are ample ammunition in the battle against Arianism and its de-emphasis on the divinity of Christ. They demonstrate the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of Jesus Christ whom Patrick professes as “Lord and God” (*Conf.* 4). However, to recognize only the refutation of Arianism in the text without equally acknowledging the references to the humanity of Christ is to misread it. Christ for Patrick is the Christ of Nicæa, divine and human.⁷⁹ A Noel O’Donoghue summarizes, “The face of God has indeed become a human face [...]. This other human face is the corrective and fulfilling image by which Patrick’s experience[s are] fully grasped and explored.”⁸⁰

The events of Patrick’s life portray Christ in a manner that resonated with the Irish understanding of king, one who is at once alongside and above those under his charge. Just as the connection between the Irish king and his *túath* was intimate,⁸¹ Christ is intimately involved with Patrick’s wellbeing both physically and spiritually. The imminence of Christ becomes developed to the point that Patrick has the sense of Christ within his body speaking (*Conf.*24) and praying in him (*Conf.*25) as “the inner man.” (*Conf.*25) The intimate Lord fulfills the kingly role of protector throughout Patrick’s life.

⁷⁸ James P. Mackey, ed., *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995; reprint, 1995), 60.

⁷⁹ Patrick rehearses the language of Nicæa in what has come to be referred to as *Patrick’s Rule of Faith*, a title that Patrick himself does not use.

⁸⁰ Noel Dermot O’Donoghue, *Aristocracy of Soul : Patrick of Ireland, Way of the Christian Mystics* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1987), 36.

⁸¹ See chapter 1.

Christ protects Patrick from all harm, human, natural, and supernatural, just as a king protects his *túath*. The theme of Christ's protection is so strong in the *Confessio* that tradition attributed the eighth century composition work, the *Lorica*, Patrick.⁸²

The *Lorica* portrays Patrick rising in the shielding power of Christ amidst heresy, idolatry, spells, and “cruel and merciless force[s]” while he invokes Christ's protection from burning, poison, drowning, wounding.⁸³

Further, the intimacy of Christ acting and speaking through the person of Patrick, to such a degree that the life of Patrick becomes the “letter of Christ for salvation”⁸⁴ (*Conf.* 11) underscores the humanity of Jesus Christ. A close reading of the *Confessio* displays parallels between the life of Patrick and that of Jesus Christ.

- The shepherd tending the flocks and seeking the lost sheep (*Conf.* 16)
- The missionary traveling throughout the land proclaiming the Word of God to the poor and marginalized (*Conf.* 10, EC 1)
- The victim of the religious elders. (*Conf.* 26-27, 37 *Epis.* 1)
- The sufferer who calls upon Elijah. (*Conf.* 20)
- The one who baptizes (*Conf.* 50)
- The one who walks among the Irish (*Conf.* 23)

These parallels to the life of Jesus are not hubris on the part of Patrick; rather they are tools in his catechetical method of bringing the gospel message alive to the Irish by synthesizing it with experiences with which they could resonate. The result here is an accessible narrative that points to the humanity of Christ without diminishing the divinity.

⁸² In Ireland, the word *lorica* originally referred to a pagan charm that would provide protection against evil and danger.

⁸³ See Appendix 1 for complete text.

⁸⁴ 2 Cor. 3:2-3

Peril	Blessing	Rescue	Confessio
<i>Sin Committed In Boyhood</i>	His worry was removed and he was converted “from death of disbelief”	He was allowed to continue his mission	27
<i>First Experience In Captivity</i>	Increase of love of God and faith, increase in faith	Prayer answered by a voice directing him to rescue ship	16-17
<i>Fear Of Escape To Unknown Lands</i>	His fear was alleviated	The Lord directed him to safety	17
<i>Denial Of Passage On Ship Due To Lack Of Payment</i>	Change of heart of the sailors	Sailors took him on faith	18
<i>Near Starvation By The Fellow Travelers</i>	Conversion of the sailors	Herd of pigs appears	19
<i>Satan Paralyzed Him In His Sleep</i>	Sustained by Christ	Freed from oppression	20
<i>Second Captivity</i>	A divine vision told him the days of his captivity were numbered	The Lord provided him with food and dry weather for the escape	21
<i>Daily Temptation By Satan</i>	Love of God is increased	He is strengthened to keep the faith	44
<i>Rejection By Elders</i>	The hearts of the elders were softened	The elders believed his sincerity	46
<i>Imprisonment</i>	The captors did not kill him	God freed him after 14 days	52
<i>Martyrdom Of New Converts</i>	Emphasis on love of neighbor.	His mission was not in vain	(E 16)
<i>Recounting Of The Boyhood Sin</i>	The Lord bound Patrick to himself intimately	His journey was not impeded	29

Figure 14: Patrick's Rescues

The two small texts are a carefully woven presentation of Christ drawn from the Scriptures⁸⁵ and the Fathers.⁸⁶ The Christ preached by Patrick was a divine, eternally begotten, omnipotent God who was intimately involved with his faithful charge, adjudicating, protecting, speaking, praying, and rescuing; actions of a *túathal* king. Moreover, Christ, through the story of Patrick, is one who walks among the Irish, shepherds them, and baptizes them into new life with him, the True Son, demonstrating a familiar Lord, one who truly “was always among his people as well as over them.”⁸⁷ While Patrick did not utilize the vocabulary of the christological debates, his Christology is indeed a Roman Catholic Christology. He presented Christ to a neophyte community of believers and did so utilizing experiences that would resonate with the community. At times, he synthesized native symbolism and the Christian message. At others, he supplanted indigenous concepts with Christian ones. In his evangelization efforts, Patrick truly serves as the “Letter of Christ” for the Irish.

Irish Hagiography as Theological Exposition

Written accounts of the lives and words of holy persons trace to the period of the patriarchs in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Over time, this practice evolved into the literary genre known as hagiography, “holy writings.” Hagiographical materials fall into

⁸⁵ In all Patrick quotes fifty four from fifty four biblical books with *Psalms*, *Romans*, *Acts*, *Matthew*, and both *Corinthian* texts being the most frequent. Conneely, Finan, and Bastable, *St. Patrick's Letters: A Study of Their Theological Dimension*, 161.

⁸⁶ Conneely has found allusions to at least twenty patristic texts. Ibid.

⁸⁷ John MacQuarrie, “Paths in Spirituality,” in *Irish Spirituality*, ed. Michael Maher (Dublin: Veritas, 1981), 7.

one of three styles,⁸⁸ *martyrion* (accounts of martyrdom e.g. *Perpetua and Felicitas*), *apophthegmata* (sayings collections e.g., *The Gospel of Thomas*), or the primary style utilized by the early Irish Church, *vitae* (*Lives of the Saints*).⁸⁹ Dorothy Bray notes that in writing the *vitae*, “the Irish hagiographers were able to draw upon a vast storehouse of international, biblical, and native Irish elements available through ecclesiastical learning and Irish storytelling traditions.”⁹⁰ The resultant texts approach the saint’s life with the premise “that the narrative is true, that the saint in question lived and performed the deeds described in his or her biography.”⁹¹

In the early Irish Church, hagiographical materials served both political and catechetical aims. Politically, *vitae* reinforced claims of lineage,⁹² offering a measure of legitimization when monasteries fought for primacy (with both one another and Armagh).⁹³ They also supported the monastic shrines to saints that, in turn, provided

⁸⁸ Here I draw from Sellner’s categories of hagiography. Edward C. Sellner, “Songs of Praise: Early Celtic Hagiographies and Their Spirituality,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1996): 154.

⁸⁹ The earliest Christian *Vita* is fourth century *Life of St. Anthony* by Athanasius. As Eric Dodds notes, Athanasius appears to have been influenced stylistically by the *Life of Pythagoras* by Porphyry. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety : Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (New York: Norton, 1965), 31.

⁹⁰ Dorothy Ann Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints*, vol. 252, *Ff Communications* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1992), 13.

⁹¹ Although the truthfulness of the text is more a literary and catechetical device than statement of fact. Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987), 2.

⁹² As Alan Thacker writes, “In Ireland, a saint was thought to act as patron of a particular lineage, usually that of which he himself was a member. He was likely to have founded the principal church of that lineage and to lie in its cemetery. As a patron, it was he after whom new churches founded by that lineage were named; he might indeed be patron of a whole *familia* or association of churches.” Alan Thacker, “*Loca Sanctorum* : The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints,” in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 37.

⁹³ See chapter 2.

economic benefit through the pilgrimage trade. Catechetically, *vitae* bridged the gap between the native Irish storytelling tradition and the Christian faith by adding Christians to the cadre of Irish heroes.⁹⁴ These lives of these heroic saints taught “people about holiness, service, and ultimately union with God.”⁹⁵ There is no reason to believe that, especially after their translation (or composition) into the vernacular, the *vitae* were exclusively for clerical use. On the contrary, the research of Dorothy Bray and David Hunter demonstrates that the liturgical celebrations of the early Irish Church included (at times) reading and preaching on the *vitae*.⁹⁶ In addition, because many of the texts highlight the practice of fosterage within the monastic enclosures, it is probable that reading of the *vitae* was also useful for the edification of the fosterlings within the monastic community.⁹⁷

In this section, I underscore the catechetical aspects of two seventh century Irish

⁹⁴ Bray notes, “To say that the Irish hagiographers treated their saints as heroes in the same sense as the secular storytellers treated their subjects is not mere rhetoric; this idea is integral to the ‘saintly’ image which they, the writers of the saints’ lives, sought to present.” Dorothy Ann Bray, “Some Aspects of Hagiography in the Celtic Church,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 21 (1982): 111. See also chapter 1.

⁹⁵ Sellner, “Songs of Praise: Early Celtic Hagiographies and Their Spirituality,” 161.

⁹⁶ Bray, “Some Aspects of Hagiography in the Celtic Church,” 115. David G. Hunter, ed., *Preaching in the Patristic Age: Studies in Honor of Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), esp 198-211.

⁹⁷ In contradiction to Heist who states, “[A]ll [Tírechán, Muirchú, and Adomnán] of course operate to glorify the saints they celebrate, and hence their churches; but they seem not intended for the monastic society itself and not for outsiders, not even for the Irish Christian laity” without substantiation for imposing a limitation. William H. Heist, “Irish Saints’ Lives, Romance, and Cultural History,” in *Medievalia Et Humanistica*, ed. Paul Maurice Clogan, *Studies in Medieval & Renaissance Culture (New Series)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 35. Given the relationships and mutual responsibilities outlined in the Irish legal tracts, I propose that this mutuality extended into the liturgical and educational ministries of the monastic community.

vitae, Cogitosus' *Vita Brigitae*,⁹⁸ and Muirchú's *Vita sancti Patricii*.⁹⁹ I selected these texts because of their intertextuality,¹⁰⁰ and because they present Irish understandings of Ecclesiology and Christology embodied in the stories of Brigit and Patrick respectively.

Cogitosus' Brigit: Mater Ecclesia Hibernica

At the closing of the third session of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI proclaimed, "*Igitur ad Beatae Virginis gloriam ad nostrumque solacium, Mariam Sanctissimam declaramus Matrem Ecclesiae*" (Therefore, for the glory of the Virgin Mary and for our own consolation, we proclaim the Most Blessed Mary Mother of the Church).¹⁰¹ This was not a new ecclesiological or Marian sentiment, nor was it made in a vacuum; its tradition traces back at least to the fourth century writings of Ambrose of Milan.¹⁰² Cogitosus' *Vita Brigitae*, the earliest Irish hagiographical text,¹⁰³ contains a

⁹⁸ Cogitosus, "Life of St. Brigid the Virgin," in *Saint Patrick's World*, ed. Liam De Paor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 7th cent). Although the de Paor text uses the spelling B-r-i-g-i-d, for consistency I have used the commonly accepted spelling of B-r-i-g-i-t.

⁹⁹ Muirchú, "Vita Patricii," Ibid (7th cent.).

¹⁰⁰ Muirchú writes, "I have taken the child's skiff out on this most dangerous deep sea of sacred history [...] into an unknown ocean previously entered and experienced by no boat except one only – that of my father Cogitosus." Ibid, 177.

¹⁰¹ Paul VI, "Discourse at the Conclusion of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Council on November 21, 1964," (Vatican City: Roman Catholic Church, available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641121_conclusions-iii-sessions_lt.html).

¹⁰² Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam* (electronic) (Chadwyck-Healey Inc, 390 [cited 25 April 2008]); available from [http://pld.chadwyck.com.proxy.bc.edu/all/fulltext?ACTION=byid&ID=Z100141318&WARN=N&TOCHITS=N&ALL=Y&FILE=../session/1212709055_11739](http://pld.chadwyck.com.proxy.bc.edu/all/fulltext?ACTION=byid&ID=Z100141318&WARN=N&TOCHITS=N&ALL=Y&FILE=../session/1212709055_11739.). §1555. The first modern treatment of the topic was Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Handbuch Der Katholischen Dogmatik*, 4 vols., vol. 3, *Theologische Bibliothek* (Freiburg: Herder, 1873), esp 604-613. See also Yves Congar, *Christ, Our Lady and the Church: A Study in Eirenic Theology* trans. Henry St. John (London: Langmans Green & Co., 1957).

strong ecclesiological focus that couples with the life of Brigit of Kildare, the premier female Irish saint. As “Mary of the Gaels,”¹⁰⁴ Cogitosus presents Brigit by a new title, *Mater Ecclesia Hibernica* (Mother of the Irish Church).

Cogitosus deftly weaves political¹⁰⁵ and catechetical hagiographic components with the events of Brigit’s life. He also offers a detailed description of the early Irish religious center at Kildare.¹⁰⁶ The text presents Brigit as a woman of deep faith and compassion for others who, at the same time, interacts as an equal to bishops and administers the monastery at Kildare. The result is a story that undergirds the importance of the monastery at Kildare and portrays Brigit as an exemplar of the Christian life,¹⁰⁷ all the while demonstrating the omnipotence of God.

The episcopal pericopes are literary devices that serve propagandistic goals while offering understanding of Irish ecclesiology at the time of Cogitosus.¹⁰⁸ He sets the events of Brigit’s life within a framework that highlights the importance of the monastic settlement at Kildare. The *Vita Brigitae* begins by extolling the primacy of the Kildare

¹⁰³ Snyder, *Irish Jesus, Roman Jesus: The Formation of Early Irish Christianity*, 197. Oliver Davies notes that it is the “best known of the various *Lives* of Brigit and it can be dated to the period from 650-690.” Oliver Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Lawrence Boadt, *The Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 32. There was of course another text on Brigit, the *Vita Prima*. and while it is possible that it predated Cogitosus’ work, a conclusive date has not been established or accepted; therefore I proceed from the perspective that Cogitosus’ text is the earliest.

¹⁰⁴ A title attributed to Brigit in the fifteenth century *Book of Lismore*.

¹⁰⁵ “It [Kildare] is the head of virtually all the Irish churches and occupies the first place, excelling all the monasteries of the Irish.” Cogitosus, “Life of St. Brigid the Virgin,” 207.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 222-223.

¹⁰⁷ One miracle attributed to Brigit by Cogitosus would be condemned today. She terminated the pregnancy of a vowed woman “returning her to health and penance” (220).

¹⁰⁸ Written 100 years after the time of Brigit it more than likely represents the Church of Cogitosus’ time rather than that of Brigit.

center; attributing it solely to the efforts of Brigit (207).¹⁰⁹ Here Cogitosus presents Brigit's motivation for her ecclesial involvement as "the orderly direction of souls" and concern "about the churches which adhered to her in many territories" (208). The text concludes with a detailed physical description of the church at Kildare and the surrounding establishment, which he terms "Brigit's City" (222-223). Presented in the context of a hagiographical account of the venerable Brigit, this literary structure underscores the importance of the Church in early Christian Ireland, especially in Kildare.¹¹⁰

Cogitosus intertwines biblical images and native Irish understandings of hospitality in his presentation of Brigit's miracles of supplying butter (208), pork (209), and milk (210). Brigit reveals God (213-214) because "her fire of inextinguishable faith," serves as the impetus for God to act through her in all aspects of the created order. Indeed, her miracles demonstrate authority over the cosmos as she hangs her cloak on a moonbeam (210), and of the natural world in that dogs (212), cows (213), wolves (214), and rivers (213) obey her commands. Christ himself (disguised as a beggar) provides her with the vestments that she offers to the bishop Conláeth to celebrate the liturgical solemnities (219). Like Christ, Brigit preaches to those at the margins of society (216), cures sin (216), and dispenses justice (217-21).

¹⁰⁹ All references to Cogitosus' *Vita Brigitae* are to the text as found in De Paor. Cogitosus, "Life of St. Brigid the Virgin."

¹¹⁰ Although Dorothy Bray notes that Cogitosus probably modeled his text on the Welsh *Vita Samsonis*, these ecclesiological references and foci are independent of the earlier text. Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints*, 12. See also Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. Longman & Todd Ltd Darton, 3rd ed. (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997).

However, the allusions to Mary and the Church are the most striking features of the *Vita Brigitae*. Drawing upon Lucan imagery, Cogitosus repeatedly remarks about Brigit's "purity in virginity and heart."¹¹¹ Like Mary, Brigit is the "handmaid of God" (211),¹¹² in whom the "goodness of God is made manifest" (210-211).¹¹³ Cogitosus adapts the Gospel account of the wedding at Cana to a story in which Christ comes to change water into beer for lepers because of Brigit's abiding faith (211). Additionally, in the Irish context, Brigit rises to become involved in the administration of the church,

She called on a famous hermit, distinguished in every way, a man through whom God made much goodness manifest, to leave his hermitage and his solitary life and to come and join her in that place so that he might rule the church with her in episcopal dignity, and so ensure that nothing of the priestly office would be lacking in her establishments (208).

After miraculously replacing a broken loom for a poor woman in Co. Meath, Brigit "continued on her *pontifical* [italics mine] way" (210). Her relatives came to her and "prostrated themselves at her feet" after another miracle (220). Together, the Marian imagery coupled with the ecclesial references, offer the reader an image of Brigit who, like Mary, is a type of the Church;¹¹⁴ one where the Reign of God is manifest in the lives of the Irish people.

¹¹¹ Lk 2:19, 51.

¹¹² Lk 1:38.

¹¹³ Lk 1:30b-32, 47-50.

¹¹⁴ Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam* §1555.

Muirchú's *Vita Patricii* as Christological Model

There are two early (seventh century) *Lives* of Patrick, one written by Muirchú and one by Tírechán. Muirchú's account is the one chosen for this study¹¹⁵ because it 1) is the earlier of the two,¹¹⁶ 2) has a dependency (or at least familiarity) with the *Confessio*,¹¹⁷ and 3) is closer to a biography of the saint than the more explicitly political travelogue of Tírechán's account.¹¹⁸ In addition, the text by Muirchú contains strong theological undertones as well as overt attempts to link Patrick with great men of faith from the Hebrew Scriptures (Jonah, Moses),¹¹⁹ thereby rendering the nature of the text more catechetical than that of Tírechán.

As with the *Confessio*, Muirchú's *Vita sancti Patricii* offers many parallels between the life and ministry of Patrick and the life and ministry of Jesus. From the outset, although Patrick was a Briton, Muirchú establishes a strong connection with the

¹¹⁵ Of course, this will not be an exhaustive treatment of the catechetical nature of the text something which is beyond the scope and nature of its inclusion here. Here I will highlight some of the christological nuances that are original to Muirchú. This serves my argument that the text is a christologically rich catechetical document while complementing rather than repeating the christological emphases of the *Confessio* discussed in the previous section.

¹¹⁶ Thomas O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World and God in Early Irish Writings* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 28. However, I must note that this is a change from Bieler's position that "all attempts at dating their works more accurately or at establishing a chronologically relationship between them are inconclusive." Ludwig Bieler, "Hagiography and Romance in Medieval Ireland," in *Medievalia Et Humanistica*, ed. Paul Maurice Clogan, *Studies in Medieval & Renaissance Culture (New Series)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 17.

¹¹⁷ O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 28, 96.

¹¹⁸ The motivation of Tírechán's text appears to be to claim religious foundations for the paruchia of Armagh rather than to describe the ministry of Patrick.

¹¹⁹ For more on the theological aspects of Muirchú's *Vita* see O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 87-108. and Joseph Falaky Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 40-135. Both of these studies examine the broad theological themes present in Muirchú (including Mosaic and prophetic theologies) in addition to christological aspects. Nagy offers a thematic analysis of the christological parallels addressing similarities such as "recruiting from the margins" and "children of the new order".

Hebraic tradition (177).¹²⁰ Like the Hebrew prophets, Patrick had a vision of heaven (188-189). Like Jesus, he is a teacher (187)¹²¹ who began his ministry at age thirty (178).¹²² Cogitosus' Patrick possessed the gift of foresight (179)¹²³ and people declared him the fulfillment of prophecy (180).¹²⁴ In his ministry (179), he went "fishing with the net of the gospel" (178)¹²⁵ and carried a small doe upon his shoulders (192).¹²⁶ Cogitosus offers many parallels between the miraculous deeds of Patrick and Jesus. For instance, Patrick calmed fears on a boat in a storm (177)¹²⁷ and passed through closed doors (185).¹²⁸ Like Jesus, early in his career, Satan put him to the test (178)¹²⁹ and unbelievers doubted him but came to exclaim, "In truth this man is of God" (189).¹³⁰

This brief survey offers a glimpse of the conflation of the understanding of Christ in the early Irish Church with the premier Irish Christian, Patrick. However, this commingling did not totally subsume Patrick's own identity and personhood, he retained some of his clearly non-Christ-like attributes, e.g., he was a slave (177) who required redemption (180) and gained grace (181). The text taught the readers/hearers

¹²⁰ All references to the *Vita* are to page numbers of the text as found in de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*, 75-98. Mt 1:17

¹²¹ Mt 8:19, 12:38, 19:16

¹²² Lk 3:23

¹²³ Mt 26:34, Mk 14:30, Lk 22:34, Jn 13:38

¹²⁴ Mt 26:56, Mk 14:49

¹²⁵ Mt 4:19, Mk 1:17

¹²⁶ Mt 18:10-14, Lk 15:3, Jn 10:1-18. Here I see parallels between Patrick as the caretaker of deer, and Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

¹²⁷ Mt 8:23-27, Mk 4: 35-41, Lk 8:22-25

¹²⁸ Jn 20:24-29

¹²⁹ Mt 4:1-11, Mk 1:12-13, Lk 4:1-13

¹³⁰ Lk 23:39-43

about not only Patrick the Briton but also inculturated the life of Jesus Christ into the Irish milieu. The parallels serve as a literary device to present Christian morality with a paranentic call to lives of Christian devotion exemplified by Patrick's own life.¹³¹

Cogitosus' account of Patrick made the Christian story of salvation accessible and meaningful for their lives as inhabitants of Ireland in the early Christian period. While it may have also been value-laden in other aspects (e.g., political or heroic), the christological imagery demonstrates that the text was more than a new hero's tale or propagandizing text; it was a means of propagating Christian faith in the lives of the early Irish people.

The Sacramental Life in Early Christian Ireland

Liturgy and Christology

The liturgical materials selected for inclusion here lay bare “the whole portrait of Jesus conveyed in the liturgy”¹³² for the contemporary reader who desires an understanding of the “source and summit” of Irish Christianity— the Mass.¹³³

The first two selections,¹³⁴ the *Communion Hymn (Sancti venite)*,¹³⁵ and the *Hymn at the Lighting of the Paschal Candle (Ignis creator igneus)*,¹³⁶ date from the seventh

¹³¹ Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 6.

¹³² O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 159.

¹³³ Because the term “liturgy” refers to many forms of prayer and worship, in this chapter I use “Mass” to designate the communal Eucharistic celebration from other liturgies.

¹³⁴ Chosen because of their Irish provenance and their use within the Mass.

¹³⁵ Tatha Wiley, *Thinking of Christ : Proclamation, Explanation, Meaning* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

¹³⁶ Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education : Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980; reprint, 1999). “The blessing of the new fire on holy Saturday, is unknown to the liturgical books of Rome and Gaul, seems to have originate din Ireland.” Archdale A. King, *Liturgies of the Past*, ed. Archdale A. King, vol. 4, *Rites of Western Christendom*, (Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co., 1959), 224.

century¹³⁷ *Antiphonary of Bangor*¹³⁸ which contains a total of twelve hymns¹³⁹ as well as a number of collects and antiphons. According to Michael Curran, the hymns of the *Antiphonary* represent “perhaps not all the hymns they knew but at least the ones most commonly used”¹⁴⁰ by the monastic community at Bangor and elsewhere across Ireland. These two selections from the *Antiphonary* have a strong soteriological emphasis. They entreat Christ to come to the aid of the Irish in order to guard them from corporeal maladies and to guide them to eternal salvation

The *Communion Hymn* (*Sancti venite*) is one of the earliest Irish Latin hymns and “the preface to the *Audite omnes* in the *Leabhar Breac* leads many to believe that the *Sancti venite* was a very popular Eucharistic hymn in medieval Ireland.”¹⁴¹ The text stresses the role and efficacy of Jesus Christ in the salvation of the faithful. Christ is the “leader O’ Lord” (9), the “Son of God” (4), and “giver of salvation” (4), who guards the saints (9), “grants noble grace” (7), “bestows light” (7) and “dispenses life eternal” (9). Although the hymn relates to “the sacrifices of the Old Law which foreshadowed the sacred mysteries,”¹⁴² it does not carry the Hebrew sense of a people’s divine election. On the contrary, it emphasizes the universality of salvation in Christ, the “Savior of all” (7)

¹³⁷ Richter claims “there is enough evidence to suggest that they [the hymns] were, for the most part, composed in the sixth century.” Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, 200.

¹³⁸ While the English translations are noted above, the Latin text and apparatus can be found in Michael Curran, *The Antiphonary of Bangor: And the Early Irish Monastic Liturgy* (Blackrock: Irish Academic, 1984).

¹³⁹ The twelve hymns address a variety of Christian themes: the life of Christ (2), the Trinity (1), in praise of saints (3), in praise of martyrs (1), a communion hymn (1), blessing of the paschal candle (1), in praise of Bangor and its abbots (2), for the midnight office (1). Ibid, 19.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 84.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 49.

¹⁴² Ibid, 48.

who is “both priest and victim” (5) and was “sacrificed for all” (5). Therefore, “all have escaped the jaws of hell” (3) and been “redeemed” (1). As the Alpha and Omega (11) who “will judge all” (11), he offers the “protection of eternal salvation” (8) for all who “draw near [the Eucharist] with pure and faithful minds” (8).

The *Hymn at the Lighting of the Paschal Candle* (*Ignis creator igneus*) takes the sense of christological prefiguring in the Hebrew Scriptures¹⁴³ a step further. Christ, present among the community in the flame of the paschal candle, is the God of the burning bush in Exodus/Deuteronomy (1). Just as God, through the pillars of clouds and fire, guided and protected the Israelites in their liberation from Egypt (2), so too Christ calls out to the faithful and illuminates their way (3). The text then turns to include the Irish in salvation history with reassurances that Christ is intimately aware of the plight of the Irish who were chosen by God (4). He purifies their hearts (4), lightens their burdens, and frees them with the promise of heaven (4).

Attuned to the purpose of the hymn, the lighting of a candle, not only is the fire symbolic for Christian faith, so too is the wax that “glows with the Holy Spirit” (3). The source of the wax, bees and honeycombs, are important in that God “store[s] now in the recesses of the comb the sweet food of divine honey [that purifies] the inmost cells of the heart” (3). This apicultural motif also applies to the baptized who as the “swarm of the new brood” (3) “win heaven on wings now free from care.” (3)

¹⁴³ A move away from the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia .

These two selections from the *Antiphonary of Bangor*, demonstrate a high christological understanding¹⁴⁴ with the *Ignis* intermingling Christian faith with the indigenous images of Irish beekeeping.¹⁴⁵ These texts deftly weave the Hebrew and Christian scriptural themes with the experience of the Irish believers in such a way that the worship of Christ in the Mass is one who is both familiar and new, omnipotent yet intimate, protector, and savior.

The next selections,¹⁴⁶ the *Tract on the Mass*, and the two Eucharistic chants, *Congnouerunt Dominum* and *Pacem meam*, are from the late eighth century *Stowe Missal*;¹⁴⁷ a product of the *Céle Dé* movement.¹⁴⁸ O'Loughlin notes that the *Missal* is “the oldest such book [*Sacramentary*] from the early Irish church that has survived intact.”¹⁴⁹ These selections underscore that the sense of communal identity prevalent in native Irish society transformed into a new corporate Christian identity – the Body of Christ. The hymns convey the sense that the participants in the Mass were “less concerned with the notion of Christ’s presence as a static fact [...] than with the notion that it is Christ who is the one who is sharing the meal and breaking the loaf which is his

¹⁴⁴ While the *Antiphonary* contains two low christological hymns (*Hymnum dicat turba fratrum* and *Praecamur Patrum*), these hymns were for the Daily Office rather than Mass. Of note however is the emphasis in the *Hymnum dicat* on the kingship of Christ which “was one of the favourite themes of early Irish piety.” Curran, *The Antiphonary of Bangor: And the Early Irish Monastic Liturgy*, 33.

¹⁴⁵ Bee-keeping merited its own law in the *Seanchas Mór* attesting to its importance.

¹⁴⁶ as translated in Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*. Photographs of the leaves of the *Missal* can be found in G. F. Warner, *The Stowe Missal Ms. D. li 3 in the Library of the Royal. Irish Academy Dublin*, ed. Henry Chadwick, vol. 31-32, *Henry Bradshaw Society for Rare Liturgical Texts* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1989).

¹⁴⁷ Maher notes that the liturgical formulae of the *Missal* represents rubrics used in Irish monasteries in the sixth and early seventh centuries. Michael Maher, *Irish Spirituality* (Dublin: Veritas, 1981), 19.

¹⁴⁸ See chapter 2 for a description of the *Céle Dé*.

¹⁴⁹ O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 130.

body. It is then having a share in that broken loaf that established communion [sic] with him.”¹⁵⁰ For example, the *Tract on the Mass* states, “knowledge of Christ has been renewed through all his members and deeds.”

The *Tract on the Mass* contains nineteen paragraphs explaining the symbolism of the liturgical elements and actions. Two examples of these are:

1. The altar represents the persecution that is inflicted. The chalice represents the church that has been established and founded on the persecution and martyrdom of the prophets and others. (1)
2. The three steps backward, which the priest takes and the three steps forward is the triad in which everyone sins, that is, in word thought and deed and this is the triad whereby we are renewed again and move towards Christ’s body. (9)

As with the *Antiphonary of Bangor* selections, the *Tract on the Mass* references the foreshadowing of Christ in the Hebrew Scriptures. (5, 6,)

The *Cognouerunt Dominum* is a chant during the fraction (the breaking of the bread at Eucharist). The refrain, “They recognized the Lord in the breaking of the bread” intersperses with prayers that Christ the Lord will be merciful and remit sins so that the faithful will be redeemed and enjoy the fruits of heaven. The *Pacem meam* is a chant for the distribution of communion. This lengthy text weaves together the *Psalms* with the *Gospels* (and other biblical texts)¹⁵¹ and concludes with the *Glory Be*. Here, Christ teaches commands, calls the faithful unto himself, abides in the faithful, and prepares the way for their salvation. Both of these chants have strong eschatological overtones that

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 141.

¹⁵¹The biblical texts referred to in this chant are (in order of frequency): *Psalms*, *John*, *Matthew*, *Proverbs* and *Song of Solomon*. *Psalms* 24 and 43 are included in their entirety.

lead to the understanding that the communal experience in the actions of the Mass crossed the threshold between the realized and the future Reign of God.¹⁵²

These liturgical selections from the *Antiphonary of Bangor* and the *Stowe Missal* call upon the divinity of Christ as protector, savior, and liberator. Their tenor sheds light on the historical context of their authorship. The authors do not speak from a place of triumph. Instead, the texts portray a people afraid for not only their spiritual death, but also the very real human death from the many plagues and calamities that they faced.¹⁵³ These liturgical texts portray an Irish Christ, one that is both universal Lord and particular Savior in the historical context of the Irish people.

*Sermons and Homilies: Connecting Faith and Life*¹⁵⁴

The *Seanchas Mór* legislated the right for the Scriptures to be proclaimed to “all who will hear.”¹⁵⁵ While hearing the biblical texts read aloud provided a measure of literacy in the faith, the subsequent instructive comments of the preacher in the homily¹⁵⁶ provided a means of bringing that faith into the day-to-day realities of the lives of the early Christian believers. The following examination of homilies and sermons from the

¹⁵² O’Loughlin details the early medieval concept of the dual realms separated by a threshold (corporeal/the presence of the corporeal in the spiritual, the world of action/the new Jerusalem, the worship of Christ and the ministry of the people/the ministry of Christ) as representative of the realized and future eschaton. O’Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 128-129.

¹⁵³ See chapter 2 above for a discussion of the plagues and other perils.

¹⁵⁴ I use the term “homily” unless a particular text is identified as a “sermon.” I draw the distinction from Murdoch who explains that a “homily” usually expounds on a biblical selection or includes a lesson from the Mass whereas a “sermon” is more thematic preaching. Brian Murdoch, “Preaching in Medieval Ireland: The Irish Tradition,” in *Irish Preaching 700-1700*, ed. Alan J. and Raymond Gillespie Fletcher (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 41.

¹⁵⁵ Binchy, ed., *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 529.

¹⁵⁶ The Irish texts demonstrate that preaching was an activity of some frequency directed towards those in religious life as well as the laity.

sixth – ninth centuries,¹⁵⁷ either of Irish provenance, or written on the Continent by Irish *peregrini* and subsequently circulated in Ireland, [a) *Sermons of Columbanus*¹⁵⁸ (ca. 612 x 615), b) *Cambrai Homily*¹⁵⁹ (ca. 700), c) *Catechesis celtica*¹⁶⁰ (ca. 800?), and d) *In Nomine Dei Summi* collection¹⁶¹ (790 x 800)], allows access to the Christian faith of the early Irish Church. Beginning with the Pauline corpus, a “know ... and then do” rhetorical strategy has been a component of the homiletic tradition. Like Paul, the Irish texts interwove the Christian narrative with the paranentic call to live a Christian life. This combination demonstrates that Christianity was both a story and a vision that allowed for a new way of life, one that people could experience.

The first selection, the *Sermons of Columbanus*,¹⁶² is the earliest of the body of

¹⁵⁷ I rely upon McNamara' for dating the texts. Martin McNamara, "Irish Homilies A.D. 600 - 1100," in *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J.E. Cross*, ed. Thomas D. Hill and Charles D. Wright (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002).

¹⁵⁸ Columbanus, *Sermons of Columbanus* (Corpus of Electronic Texts) (University College, Cork, updated 16 Feb 2004 [cited 3 March 2005]); available from <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T201053/index.html>. See also Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400-1200* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1985), #1251.

¹⁵⁹ In Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 369-370.

¹⁶⁰ The *Catechesis Celtica* is a compilation of thirty three homilies. The full text of the corpus is currently available only in the manuscript *Vaticana Reg lat 49* although a full critical edition is forthcoming by Jean Ritmueller. O'Loughlin has a listing of the scripture verses upon which each of the homilies is based. and, the full text of one homily is included by Davies. It is this selection (from Davies) that I include here. Thomas O'Loughlin, "Irish Preaching before the End of the Ninth Century: Assessing the Extent of Our Evidence," in *Irish Preaching 700-1700*, ed. Alan J. Fletcher and Raymond Gillespie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 23-25. Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 363-365.

¹⁶¹ Mc Nally, before his death in 1977, prepared a study of these seven sermons commonly referred to as the *In Nomine Dei Summi* homiletic canon. James J. O'Donnell edited it and published it posthumously with an appendix of the text of the sermons. Robert E. McNally, "in Nomine Dei Summi': Seven Hiberno-Latin Sermons," *Traditio* 35 (1979).

¹⁶² Of the seventeen sermons attributed to Columbanus, thirteen are authentic to Columbanus and those to which I shall confine my comments. The sermons are a unit and contain intertextual references to one another. Clare Stancliffe's article argues successfully for the authorship of Columbanus. Clare Stancliffe, "The Thirteen Sermons Attributed to Columbanus and the Question of Their Authorship," in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, ed. Michael Lapidge, *Studies in Celtic History* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1997), 99-203. See also Lapidge and Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400-1200*, #1251.

texts chosen for examination here. While the other selections were for the laity, the audience here was people in the religious life.¹⁶³ In the first sermon, Columbanus offers an understanding of God who is

[...] the first and last, one and three, one in substance, three in character; one in power, three in person; one in nature, three in name; one in Godhead, Who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit, one God, wholly invisible, inconceivable, unspeakable, Whose property it is ever to exist.

*Sermon I*¹⁶⁴

The second sermon explains that God's revelation comes through creation and scripture rather than philosophical speculation (*Sermon II*). Once the monk (the audience of the sermon) understands this, Columbanus offers instruction in *Sermons III - VII* on the purpose of the earthly life as well as how to *please* God. Beginning with the earthly life, which is a "pilgrimage from the Lord" (*Sermon IV*), he instructs the listener to live with care (*Sermon V*), because this transitory existence is only a shadow of eternal life (*Sermons VI and VII*).

For Columbanus, the earthly life must always have a soteriological focus, "Let us love not the roadway rather than the homeland" (*Sermon VIII*). Yes, salvation begins in this life, but so too does damnation (*Sermon IX*). Therefore, Columbanus explains, God provided the *Law* as an aid,

For if he prostitutes for the opposite employment what he has received from the breath of God, and corrupts the blessing of his nature, then he perverts the likeness of God and destroys it as far as in him lies; yet if he employs the virtues planted in his soul to a proper end, then he will be like to God. So whatever virtues God sowed in us in our original state, He taught us in the commandments to restore the same to Him.

¹⁶³ Sermon III for example, focuses on how a monk should please God.

¹⁶⁴ Columbanus, *Sermons of Columbanus. Sermon I*

Sermon XI

The twelfth *Sermon* continues the sense of salvific hope. It counterbalances with a call to repentance, so that Christ, the “Physician of righteousness and health,” (*Sermon XIII*) will heal the soul of sin,

Thus the Lord Himself, our God Jesus Christ, is the Fountain of life,
and so He calls us to Himself the Fountain, that we may drink of Him.
He who loves drinks of Him, he drinks who is satisfied by the Word of
God, who sufficiently adores, who longs sufficiently, he drinks who
burns with the love of wisdom.

Sermon XIII

These thirteen sermons, present an early Irish constructive theology that integrates doctrine (grounded in the theological virtues of faith, love [charity]), and hope)¹⁶⁵ with practice. The result is Christian faith that embraces (as did Christ) both realized and future soteriological perspectives.

Jesus’s role as the “physician of the righteous” along with spiritual health are key concepts for the next selection, the Cambrai *Homily*. This eighth century text, based on “selections from the Pauline epistles and the homilies of Pope Gregory the Great on the gospels” explains that the healthy soul banishes vices, acquires virtues, and takes up the cross of Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁶ Along the lines of Matthew 16:24, the anonymous author calls the listeners to act in “harmony of body and soul” by following “our Lord with good deeds.”¹⁶⁷ Here “taking up the cross” is not a passive endurance of trial, but an intentional act that the disciple chooses, incorporating the whole person in will and

¹⁶⁵ The traditional ordering is faith, hope and love in accord with the Pauline model but, in the Irish schema, the ordering is usually faith, love, and hope.

¹⁶⁶ Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200*, 193. Thomas H. Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 369.

¹⁶⁷ Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*.

action. Doncha Ó Conchúir notes that in the *Cambrai Homily*, “we bear the cross of the Lord in two ways, either when we afflict abstinence upon the body or when we believe through compassion that the need of our neighbor is our own need.”¹⁶⁸ By joining in compassionate solidarity with the needs of others, the soul acquires medicinal virtue. The sense of the *Cambrai Homily* inverts the understanding of the suffering of the cross from individual physical affliction to active spiritual health for the members of the Body of Christ.

In this vein, the *Cambrai Homily* proceeds to extol the three crosses that the Christian can bear known as three martyrdoms:¹⁶⁹ white, blue,¹⁷⁰ and red. White martyrs are those who renounce everything that they love for the sake of God, but do not fast or labor. Those who, through fasting and hard work, renounce their desires and do penance are the blue martyrs. Red martyrdom is for those who endure physical destruction for Christ’s sake. Although the key actor in the martyrdom is the self, the focus is always “for” the greater good, the reign of God. The text continues with three other martyrdoms that are “precious in the eyes of God and for which we obtain rewards if we perform them: chastity in youth, moderation in abundance, or not receiving gifts that corrupt right judgments.”¹⁷¹ This final triad makes martyrdom more readily accessible to the laity and allows them to participate in the order of martyrs as they answer the call to discipleship.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 370.

¹⁷⁰ Many translations have “green” as the translation of *glas* but scholars commonly accept “blue” as the appropriate word choice.

¹⁷¹ Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, 370.

The next selection, the *Catechesis celtica*, is a compilation of thirty-three homilies or commentaries on the scriptures.¹⁷² In the selection¹⁷³ examined here pertaining to *Matthew* 16:24 there is further exposition on the Irish understanding of Jesus Christ. The text states that Jesus Christ, “the only Son of God from the human race,” is “the mediator of God and man, who is both God and man.” Although fully human, Jesus Christ, the Word, is uncreated and is of the same substance as God. For the Irish, the Incarnation of God in Jesus was because God wished to heal people, to cure them of the disease that sin wrought in creation, emphasizing salvation rather than redemption. The titles “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lords” are appropriate for Jesus Christ because he governs all that God called into being: human, animal and vegetable, seen and unseen, past, present and future. The christological images of this brief text are clearly in accord with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formulation and express belief in Jesus Christ as omnipotent divine ruler who by the incarnation, revealed himself to be just, caring, and merciful. For the Irish living under the benevolent rule of kings, this image would resonate either in their direct experience of kingship.

The seven sermons included in the next selection, the *In Nomine Dei Summi* collection, all begin with “*In nomine Dei summi*” (In the name of God most high).

¹⁷² Although Wilmart questioned the Irish provenance, McNamara, argues convincingly for the Irish authorship either in Ireland or on the continent. André Wilmart, “Analecta Reginensia: Extraits Des Manuscrits Latins De La Reine Christine Conservés Au Vatican,” *Studi e testi* 59 (1933). Martin McNamara, “Irish Affiliations of the Catechesis Celtica,” *Celtica* 21 (1990).

¹⁷³ To date no edited text with apparatus of the entire collection is available. Wilmart, like others, wrote an analysis and commentary on certain selections. However, only Davies translated and published an entire homily—from which I draw my analysis for inclusion here. Wilmart, “Analecta Reginensia: Extraits Des Manuscrits Latins De La Reine Christine Conservés Au Vatican.” David M. Hay, “Things Philo Said and Did Not Say About the Therapeutae,” in *Society of Biblical Literature, Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*; 31 (Atlanta: Scholars Pr, 1992). See also Lapidge and Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400-1200*, #974.

Sermons II – VI connect stylistically by similar conclusions containing paranentic calls to discipleship beginning with “So [...].” Like the Columbanus collection, these texts connect faith and praxis. Beginning with faith in God, move into living in faith, and end with recounting events from the life of Jesus that are exemplar soteriological moments they likewise thread the theological virtues throughout the sermons. However, unlike the Columbanus texts, these address an audience that included the laity (apparent by the exhortations in *Sermon II* to husbands and wives).¹⁷⁴

The first *Sermon* presents God as the God of justice and law. Drawing from a variety of biblical images of both the Hebrew and Christian Testaments, the text situates eternal justice as the outcome of a supernatural battle between good and evil. The soul, as a hearer and doer of the law,¹⁷⁵ acts justly, which leads to victory in the holy battle. The second *Sermon* calls the believer to understand the need for the Church and penance as aids in the just life. Citing the *Decalogue* and *Epistles* as the norm for the life that is “in the manner that is fitting for a Christian,” the author senses that no one will perfectly obey the law and encourages the listener to participate in penance, *Ad ecclesiam frequenter conuenite! Confessiones uestras sacerdotibus confitete (...).*¹⁷⁶ (Come together frequently to the church! Declare your confessions to the priests.)¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Thomas O'Loughlin, "The Celtic Homily: Creeds and Eschatology," *Milltown Studies* 41 (1998): 106.

¹⁷⁵ Rm 2:13

¹⁷⁶ McNally, "in Nomine Dei Summi": Seven Hiberno-Latin Sermons," 136.

¹⁷⁷ O'Loughlin, "The Celtic Homily: Creeds and Eschatology," 106.

Grounded either in Scripture or in the Creed, *Sermons III – VI* expand on different aspects of Christian faith.¹⁷⁸ For example, *Sermon IV* drawing from *Matthew 5-7*, instructs the listener to seek the Reign of God and its justice, “*Primum oportet querere regnum per opera bona, id est caritatem et ieiunium et orationem et humilitatem et benevolentiam*”;¹⁷⁹ (So one should first seek the kingdom through good works, that is charity, fasting and prayer and humility and benevolence).¹⁸⁰ *Sermon V*, emphasizing faith and love of God as the basis for discipleship, links discipleship with the building up of virtues, which enlightens the soul. It concludes by encouraging the listener to “consent to the Lord” and “Love the Lord for it is good” for in the end “he will be saved.”¹⁸¹

The sixth text in this collection builds upon the enlightened soul motif and brings to the fore the need for caring not only for the body but also for the soul. Just as good works may help the bodies of others, they nourish the soul of the believer as well as the recipient of the works. The works of the body care for the life of the soul and raise it up. Rounding out this compilation is *Sermon VII*, which presents seven events from the life of Christ (birth, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, right hand of God, and final judgment) as signs,¹⁸² each with a direct correlation to the salvation that the believer can hope for as a Christian, “*Primum signum natiuitas Domini nostri Iesu Christi ex Maria*

¹⁷⁸ The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan credal formula is the basis for these sermons.

¹⁷⁹ McNally, “in Nomine Dei Summi”: Seven Hiberno-Latin Sermons,” 140.

¹⁸⁰ O’Loughlin, “The Celtic Homily: Creeds and Eschatology,” 112.

¹⁸¹ Ibid: 113.

¹⁸² O’Loughlin notes that the use of “signs” is in the “Johannine sense of an event which manifests God’s glory and leads disciples to believe in him [sic].” Ibid: 114.

uirgine, ut nos renascere in innocentiam et simplicitatem puerorum." ¹⁸³ (The first sign: the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ from the Virgin Mary, so that we might be reborn in the innocence and simplicity of children).¹⁸⁴

Preaching was (and often is) a powerful reflection of the understanding of the faith and praxis of a community. In the period under consideration here, "preaching was instrumental in evangelizing Ireland. Thereafter it continued to help consolidate the faith, confession, and social identity of individuals and groups."¹⁸⁵ Just as the native Irish culture revolved around principles of behavior that regulated the relationship between the king, *túath*, and person, the Christian faith expressed in these sermon/homily collections offered a way relating, belonging, and understanding life.

Although Jesus Christ is the potent divine king and Lord who creates, governs, and orders all things, the texts exhibit an equal emphasis on divine mercy, love, and compassion. Grounded in the theological virtues of faith, love, and hope, these sermons and homilies connect faith and life explicitly. They serve as access to the Scriptures and Christian traditions, while they call the hearer to enter into the life of Jesus Christ fully, body and soul, in faith and in action.

Further, especially with the *In Nomine Dei Summi* texts, there is an assumed familiarity with the creed. The Irish converts to Christianity would have first been exposed to the creed through baptismal preparation, but the creedal overtures in the sermons (especially those geared for the laity) suggest more than a passing awareness of

¹⁸³ McNally, "In Nomine Dei Summi: Seven Hiberno-Latin Sermons," 143.

¹⁸⁴ O'Loughlin, "The Celtic Homily: Creeds and Eschatology," 114.

¹⁸⁵ Alan J. Fletcher and Raymond Gillespie, *Irish Preaching, 700-1700* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001), 12.

the creedal texts by all believers. The creed, like the scriptures, calls believers into a way of life, especially a way that is attentive to charity for those most in need. The faith confessed was not only a statement of beliefs; it was a *modus operandi* for the day-to-day living of the life of discipleship.

There are the strong eschatological and soteriological overtones present throughout these texts as well. The eschatology presented is both realized and incomplete in the earthly life and complete only post-parousia. The transience of the earthly life is a part of the soteriology of Jesus Christ, not apart from it thereby linking the earthly and heavenly realms of existence. An earthly life of faithful discipleship that includes good works, and proper behavior towards others not only makes the believer worthy of a future full participation in eternal life with Christ, it *effects* life in Christ in the human state.

These three understandings of the Christian faith provide a framework for a life of discipleship that, as Irish society converted to Christianity, coalesced in the integration of faith and life of the believer. They offered the early Irish a holistic approach to living that united praxis with belief fulfilling the O'Loughlin's claim that the "primary aim of preaching [that] is to inform, exhort, and move its hearers to Christian living."¹⁸⁶

The Sacrament of Penance and Education in the Faith

The influx of Christianity to Ireland brought with it the ancient teaching on public penance and the concomitant tension between the "notion of Jesus as ushering in the perfect life with God and as the one who welcomed sinners."¹⁸⁷ Unlike the Western

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 11.

¹⁸⁷ Thomas O'Loughlin, "Penitentials and Pastoral Care," in *A History of Pastoral Care*, ed. G. R. Evans (New York: Cassell, 2000), 93.

Church, the Eastern Church had a well-established liturgical celebration to address this tension; the sinner confessed his/her sins to the bishop, was accepted into the Order of Penitents on Ash Wednesday (and thus excluded from the Eucharist for Lent), and performed their penance publicly throughout the Lenten season. Finally, on the Tuesday or Wednesday of Holy Week he/she received absolution. Then the sinner was publicly welcomed back to the Eucharist with a special rite during the liturgy of Holy Thursday celebration of the Last Supper.

The scriptural foundation of this system of public penance rested upon *Acts* 15:29 which decries the three sins of apostasy, murder, and fornication. Although based in scripture, this system brought with it inherent liabilities in that 1) it focused on these three major sins and not the day-to-day sins of the Christian life, 2) the understanding of sin became static and objectified; the sin occurred at a particular place in time and was to be judged by God's law, and 3) this public penance, like baptism, could only be received once in a lifetime. As O'Loughlin observes, "On the one hand, it [public penance] forgets that sinful actions are located within a human being, the sins being the fruits of a disorder within life; and on the other, it tends to emphasize sin as a case of breaking a rule rather than a disruption with the Living God."¹⁸⁸

As Christianity was accepted and legitimized throughout the Roman Empire, it became apparent that this *Penitential* system was in some ways detrimental and in others, obsolete. Because the tradition reserved reception of the sacrament for three major sins, it excluded many believers from the experience of God's forgiveness. Further, because it

¹⁸⁸ O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 51.

could only be received once, many people eligible for the sacrament delayed it until they were near death and could no longer have the opportunity to sin again before dying.

The obsolescence of the practice was, in some ways, highlighted by the spread and development of Christianity. By the fifth century, Christianity was (for the most part) no longer a persecuted religion, therefore the threat of apostasy diminished. Secular laws addressed murder so that “the censure of the church was not the most pressing form of punishment to be feared.”¹⁸⁹ This left the most natural (and repeatable) of the sins, fornication. It is within this context that, as a response to the pastoral needs of the faithful the early Irish Church wrote the Penitentials¹⁹⁰ and reformed the sacrament.¹⁹¹ The *Penitentials* addressed the pastoral concern with sin in three ways: 1) confession moved from the public arena to a private relationship between penitent and confessor who was not necessarily a bishop, 2) frequent reception of the sacrament was encouraged, and 3) they broadened the scope to address all of life’s sins.

The Irish approached the sacrament with the understanding that “someone has done something that transgresses God’s law. Now they seek a remedy which will remove the offence which stands between the sinner and his or her Creator.”¹⁹² Sin was an

¹⁸⁹Ibid, 50.

¹⁹⁰ O’Loughlin points out that although penitential lists may have first appeared in Wales, they developed their characteristic form in Ireland. Dooley, on the other hand, argues that the Penitentials and the practice of private confession originated on the Continent and were imported to Ireland. However, her argument does not account for the presence of Irish monks on the Continent which would allow for a movement from Ireland to the Continent. O’Loughlin, “Penitentials and Pastoral Care,” 94. Kate Dooley, “From Penance to Confession: The Celtic Contribution,” *Bijdragen* 43 (1982).

¹⁹¹ Further, O’Loughlin notes four factors for the Irish impetus to reform the sacrament. They are: 1) the spread and dominance of monasticism in Ireland 2) the growing understanding of the Greek theology of the “baptism of tears,” 3) the sense of reparation in the Irish Law, and 4) the lack of strong ties in Ireland to the system of public penance. O’Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 53-56.

¹⁹² Ibid, 56.

offense against God, the High King, and reparation *must* occur. In the Old Irish laws, when a crime occurred, it was against the victim *and* his/her entire family group the *fine*. The Irish set the sacrament within this legal mindset. Resolution of the matter was most effective when it addressed the needs of the one offended (God) and the community of the one offended (the community of believers).¹⁹³

The Irish reform of the Sacrament of Penance rested upon twin pillars of Christianity: Scripture and the authority of the monk and ascetic writer of Southern Gaul, John Cassian (360-435). Scripturally they moved away from the understanding of penance derived from *Acts* and turned to the command of Jesus, “μετανοεῖτε!”¹⁹⁴ In doing so, penance broadened from the list of apostasy, murder, and fornication to encompass the trials of everyday life.

In Cassian’s view, sin impeded the disciple of Christ in pursuit of the perfect life. O’Loughlin notes that “[I]n cataloguing the sins of monks, his aim was not primarily a code of crimes, but an analysis of the nature of the afflictions of the soul by analogy with a physician’s knowledge of bodily diseases.”¹⁹⁵ Cassian’s eight-fold list of virtues and vices drew upon the Hippocratic approach of *contraria contrariis curantur* in other words, contraries cure contraries. Each virtue addressed a corresponding vice. In this vein, the Irish *Penitential* reformers understood the confessor as both the *medicus*

¹⁹³ Kevin Long, "Irish Monks and Pastoral Practice," *Tjurunga: An Australasian Benedictine Review* 39 (1990): 17.

¹⁹⁴ “Μετανοεῖτε” often translated as “repent” is closer to a “to change one’s mind or purpose”. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁹⁵ O’Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 53.

animarum who provided direction for spiritual health, and the animadversor who administered the justice of God's law.

Another resonance between Cassian¹⁹⁶ and the Irish *Penitential* system was the role of members of the faith community in the *Penitential* process. Kevin Long writes that the community was "to assist the penitents in their works of penance and charity, to sustain them in fasts and mortification and to offer the necessary spiritual counsel and scriptural instruction."¹⁹⁷ This spiritual supporter, known as the *anam chara* (literally "soul friend") was someone with whom the penitent could discuss his/her relationship with God, his/her shortcomings (sin), and who guided the penitent towards a healthy life that bore witness to Christian faith. As a spiritual guide, the *anam chara* reminded the penitent that the Christian God revealed in the Scriptures and discussed in the patristic writings was always readily approachable and willing to forgive. "The *anam chara* tradition, which so profoundly shaped the Irish understanding of penance, introduced not only the idea of dialog but also that of healing dialog."¹⁹⁸

The administration of Penance sometimes is (mis) understood as a system of legislated tariffs for definite crimes. The Irish confessor had both the authority and imperative to adapt the penance to the individual based on the needs and circumstances of the sin and the person. "Irish law saw penalties as reparations of damage done, not as

¹⁹⁶ I acknowledge that Cassian "echoes the humble thoughts of Antony in advocating the importance of the spiritual advice of elders" in the faith but, in the earliest years of the Irish Church, the asceticism of the desert made its way to Ireland through the eyes of Gallic monks like Cassian. John Levko, "The Relationship of Prayer to Discretion and Spiritual Direction for John Cassian," *Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1996): 168-169.

¹⁹⁷ Long, "Irish Monks and Pastoral Practice," 18.

¹⁹⁸ O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 51.

punishments to inflict suffering on the criminal; and within that framework the *Penitentials* were merely an extension of their basic legal attitude into the realm of the sacred.”¹⁹⁹ When considering the appropriate penance assigned, the *anam chara* (especially in the *Penitential of Finnian*) considered the depth of the remorse of the penitent. This assessment of the emotive aspect of the penitent parallels the teachings of Gregory of Nazianzus, Rufinus, Symeon, and Cassian.²⁰⁰ Referred to as the “baptism of tears,” the confessor would gauge whether the penitent was truly remorseful by the emotional anguish (often expressed by tears) that the penitent displayed. “(...) [t]ears were seen as washing away the sins, just as the waters of baptism had done.”²⁰¹

Combining this native legalistic view with the theology of Cassian, penance, in the Irish tradition, was medicinal rather than punitive. John McNeill writes, “[P]enance was designed and expected to bring the penitent into harmony with himself, and into right relations with the church, society, and God.”²⁰² In the Irish religious imagination, the exercise of the acts of penance was, a way to make reparations to God and community, and a prescriptive cure for the penitent.

The earliest Irish *Penitential* is the sixth century text attributed to Finnian.²⁰³ It lists forty-eight sins, thirty dealing with the clergy and the remaining eighteen pertaining to the laity. As with the other two *Penitentials* examined below (Columbanus and

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 56.

²⁰⁰ Penance for these writers is, of course, the public form of penance.

²⁰¹ O’Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 55.

²⁰² John T. McNeill, “Medicine for Sin as Prescribed in the Penitentials,” *Church History* 1, no. 1 (1932): 21.

²⁰³ Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, vol. 5, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), 74-94.

Cummean), the influence of Cassian reverberates throughout the text as it addresses the nature of penance “as a process rather than as a single momentary act. It is a regime of medicine and exercise which leads to a restored and stronger Christian.”²⁰⁴ Finnian advises the confessor to consider the sinner’s state of mind, intentions, as well as the speed with which he/she experiences sorrow and the depth of their remorse when applying a penance. For Finnian, sin is always an internal matter between the conscience of the individual and God (who was offended). Therefore, as Peter O’Dwyer notes, “in his list of penances, he distinguishes between sins of thought and deeds of sin and emphasizes a wholehearted conversion from sin.”²⁰⁵ The text describes three steps in the process of penance: 1) the penitent had to accept responsibility for his sin, 2) a petition made to God for mercy and forgiveness, and 3) the penance or recompense offered as both a consequence and a cure. Here Finnian serves as an early model of the see-judge-act theological schema.

Columbanus’ late sixth/early seventh century *Penitential* echoes Finnian in that he too distinguishes between the sins of the clergy and those of the laity. However, Columbanus expands Finnian’s theology of penance. For Columbanus, “true penance is not to commit things deserving penance but to lament such things as have been committed,”²⁰⁶ in other words, true remorse is the standard to measure true penance. Columbanus further develops the concept of *medicus animarum* of Cassian, stating that before restoration to Christian Eucharistic fellowship, the sinner must be healed, “[F]or it

²⁰⁴ O’Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 57.

²⁰⁵ Peter O’Dwyer, *Towards a History of Irish Spirituality* (Blackrock: Columba Press, 1995), 18.

²⁰⁶ *Penitential of Columbanus* as translated in Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 97.

is better to wait until the heart is healed, and becomes a stranger to offence and envy, than to rashly approach the judgment of the throne.”²⁰⁷ This healing process, underscores the importance of the *anam chara*.

Next, the *Penitential of Cummean*, written in the seventh century, derives its foundation from Cassian, Finnian, and Columbanus; however, this text displays an unparalleled depth of pastoral concern coupled with an emphasis on the concept of Christian forgiveness. In this text, the purpose of penance is to heal “the deep problems from which flow particular crimes”²⁰⁸ with “the medicine for salvation of souls.”²⁰⁹ Cummean, like Finnian, stresses the interior disposition of the penitent in his/her relationship with God and integrates the *ongoing* demands of the Christian life with the need for repentance and forgiveness from God.”²¹⁰ This dynamic understanding of sin and penance is evident in his twelve ways for the remission of sins: 1) baptism, 2) individual’s disposition of love, 3) almsgiving, 4) the presence of tears, 5) acknowledgement of crimes, 6) *Penitential* exercises, 7) amendment of ways, 8) intercession of saints, 9) mercy and faith,²¹¹ 10) by helping another turn from sin, the penitent will himself be helped by God,²¹² 11) in offering forgiveness to others the penitent be forgiven by God,²¹³ and 12) martyrdom.²¹⁴ For Cummean, the penitent was

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 107.

²⁰⁸ O’Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 61.

²⁰⁹ Cummean, “The Penitential of Cummean,” in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Oliver Davies, *The Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters* (New York: Paulist Press), 230.

²¹⁰ O’Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 64.

²¹¹ Mt 5:7

²¹² Jms 5:20

²¹³ Lk 6:37

not a passive recipient of grace, but an active bodily participant in the redemptive process.

The Sacrament of Penance in the early Irish Church was a ministry of education paired with forgiveness that allowed for the frequent spiritual counsel of penitents. The Irish *Penitentials* were manuals for theological practices rooted in pastoral care for the community of believers. Through participation in the sacrament, the penitents, became aware of the current dis-ease in their relationship with God and life of discipleship, recognized their failings personally, and through their acts of confession received instruction and support so that they could indeed obey the command of Jesus, “μετανοείτε!”

Conclusion

Ecclesiologist Michael Himes is well known for his adage “so your Christology, so too your Ecclesiology.” This principle holds true just as much for the early Irish Church as it does for people of faith today. The understanding of Jesus Christ for the early Irish was deeply rooted in the biblical accounts rather than a metaphysical analysis of doctrine. The *Bible* was full of symbols, metaphors, and images that resonated with the native Irish culture. Because of their emphasis on the concrete application of the biblical message, the commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Pelagius served as bridges between Irish attitudes and the text itself. For the Irish the Bible and the commentaries recorded a living tradition that had a direct bearing on the Christian life.

²¹⁴ Lk 23:42. Irish martyrdom was a “way of life rather than death [and] may be taken as further evidence that they considered penitential activity to have life-giving and curative or healing power and, therefore not a purely negative pursuit.” Hugh Connolly, *Irish Penitentials and Their Significance for the Sacrament of Penance Today* (Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1995), 13.

The christological understandings that emerged in early Ireland were grounded in the personhood of Jesus of Nazareth as the one who explicated the will of God in word and action for the benefit of all humanity. For the Irish, this pedagogical role was the premier activity of Christian discipleship to be emulated and continued by the followers of Christ. This is evident in the proliferation of schools and education in the monastic network, in the approach to the liturgy and the sacraments, and in the texts produced by the early Irish Church.

From this understanding there developed a strong soteriological understating of the role of Christ in the lives of Christians and in the natural order. Drawing again from familiar concepts, the Irish emphasized the Lordship of Christ as protector and savior similar to (but more expansive than) the Irish understanding of kingship. Christ as Lord is intimately aware of the needs of the believers and is a bulwark from perils that threaten both body and soul. Because Christ is one with God, the created order obeys his divine commands. Much like the client-king bonds in the indigenous culture, Irish believers must live their lives out in a covenantal relationship with God in Christ while also receiving the fruits of the relationship—salvation.

The reciprocity prevalent in pre-Christian Ireland extended into the ecclesiological psyche of early Christian Ireland. The Church was not simply a building where one worshipped God. It reflected the sense of the collective identity of the *túath*, in that the Church *was* the Body of Christ where the lives of all its members revealed the ongoing divine presence in the lives of the believers. The early Irish Church stressed the importance of educating believers so that they could actively and consciously participate

in the Reign of God in both the temporal world and the world to come. This participation involved acting with compassion and extending hospitality to one another and to strangers. It meant showing mercy as a means of curing the sins of others and supporting one another in times of penance and temptation. The Church in early Christian Ireland was rooted in the Good News of the *Bible*. It sought to obey the command of Jesus to “teach all people” by educating the pagan Irish as part of the process of evangelization. It encouraged its members to live lives of faith through explicit recognition of their identity as members of the New Covenant with Christ. “So your Christology, so too your Ecclesiology.”

CHAPTER 4: EARLY IRISH CHRISTIANITY, CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY, AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION - A CONVERSATION.

Introduction

The first three chapters of this work moved from a foundational look at pre-Christian Irish society to an examination of the evangelization of Ireland. The focus became progressively narrower in order to highlight core understandings and practices of early Irish Christianity. At this point, I turn away from the past towards contemporary theological and religious education discussions, bringing along the wisdom of early Christian Ireland as a significant contributor to the conversation.

Historically, one became a Christian through initiation into the creed, code, and cult of the Church. While these aspects of faith identity are necessary, they are insufficient in and of themselves, because they tend to over-emphasize the institutional Church while relegating to a lesser status the importance of religious experiences. Because *Lumen gentium* affirms that both the hierarchical society *and* the body of Christ form “one complex reality,”¹ any discussion of Ecclesiology must be attentive to both the institutional and *communio* models of the Church. I propose a turn to a different triad, one emphasized by the early Irish Church,—Christ the King, covenant, and community—to foster identity as Catholic Christians. My approach offers mutually interpenetrating tenets of Christianity that precede an understanding of the institutional Church. When fully embraced, they build up both the body of Christ and the visible Church, thereby providing an adequate precursor to and holistic affirmation of creed, code, and cult.

¹ Catholic Church, “Lumen Gentium,” in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello 1996), 49.

The survey of the early Irish Christian experience demonstrated that evangelization centering upon Christ the King, covenant, and community allows access to experiential faith, which permeates all aspects of life, bringing life to faith and faith to life. By refocusing the attention of religious education² efforts—not only in the catechesis of initiation but also in the ongoing understandings and formation of faith identity—persons of faith learn to come together as a community of believers acknowledging their conviviality.³ This leads to full participating in the institutional Church in a manner that displays an appreciation for the complex living reality of the Church in both its institutional and spiritual realities. The *General Directory for Catechesis* underscores both the importance and urgency of this approach,

The evangelizing activity of the Church, catechesis included, must tend *all the more decisively* toward solid ecclesial cohesion. To this end, it is *urgent* that an authentic Ecclesiology of communion be promoted and deepened in order to arouse in Christians a deep ecclesial spirituality.⁴ (italics mine)

The ministry of catechesis is the primary means by which believers can come to realize fully their convivial relationship as the body of Christ and the consequent responsibility to full participation in the Church; both of which should have direct bearing on their daily lives. This, in turn, builds up the Church. Catholic theologian

² Some authors uses the term “catechesis,” others prefer “religious education.” While religious education is only one task of the ministry of catechesis, for smoother reading and use of a variety of references without explanation or disclaimers, I use the terms interchangeably. Catholic Church. Congregatio pro Clericis, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), § 86-87.

³ I borrow the term “conviviality” from Ivan Illich. “I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man—made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value.” Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Boyars, 1984), 6-7.

⁴ Catholic Church. Congregatio pro Clericis, *General Directory for Catechesis*, §28.

Edward Schillebeeckx observes, “Many Christians gave the impression that Christianity was an ideological superstructure, or a special department where people talked about forgiveness, redemption, the cross and resurrection, while life in this world waited outside.”⁵ As the foci for catechetical efforts, the new triad of Christ the King, covenant and community, allows for the integration of faith and life so that belief in Christ permeates all of the activities of human life. This eliminates the artificial dichotomy between personal and faith identities, what Edward Schillebeeckx terms a “ghetto-Christianity.”⁶ The result is the formation of persons who recognize that faith and life are a unity in which they as Christians are active participants and agents of the reign of God.

What is Old is New Again: Irish Resourcement for the Twenty First Century

In this section, I bring Christ the King, covenant, and community into conversation with modern christological and ecclesiological approaches that resonate with those of the early Irish Church and while offering enrichment for catechesis for the Catholic Church in the 21st century. This intertwining of historical and contemporary perspectives is emblematic of the Catholic Christian tradition, one that honors its heritage by drawing upon historical experiential wisdom to provide a theological lens for understanding and enriching faith today. This was the pedagogy of the early Church, as it was for the early Christian Irish. To ignore it is to render faith as “a superstructure erected on top”⁷ of daily life rather than an integrated lived reality.

⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Church and Mankind,” in *Dogma: The Church and Mankind*, ed. Karl Rahner, *Concilium: Theology in the Age of Renewal* (New York: Paulist Press, 1964), 70.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Archbishop William Borders, the retired Archbishop of Baltimore, claimed, “*Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes* are really basic and fundamental if we are going to understand ministry in the Church today. Before we move towards the development and understanding of ministry, we really have to have an Ecclesiology that comes from Vatican II.”⁸ The goal here is not to proclaim a new Ecclesiology or its underlying Christology,⁹ but to demonstrate how a shift to this latent Irish triad is both timely and beneficial to the ministry of religious education in the Church today.¹⁰ Following Borders’ thought, the primary partner selected for the conversation is one of the *peritus* from the Second Vatican Council, Edward Schillebeeckx.¹¹ Not only was Schillebeeckx instrumental in the formation of several of the documents produced by the Council, his christological and ecclesiological perspectives enhance understandings of the relationship between Christ the King, covenant, and community as reflected in the early Irish Church.

Jesus Christ the Ard Rí

The Christology of the early Irish Church, despite the Irish inclusion of Pelagius and Theodore of Mopsuestia among their authoritative *patres*, was consistent with the orthodox faith of the time. Its particularity lies not in some infusion of druidic principles or other pagan incursions (as is the common misconception), but in the effort made by the Irish authors to emphasize the relationship between faith in Jesus Christ and Irish life,

⁸ Bernie Swain, "Where Do We Go from Here? An Interview with Archbishop William Borders," in *Growing Together: Conference on Shared Ministry*, ed. Henri Nouwen, et al. (Washington DC: US Catholic Conference, 1980), 81.

⁹ See chapter 3 for my understanding of the relationship between Christology and Ecclesiology

¹⁰ The GDC refers to this ministry as one which “in all the ministries and services which the particular church performs, [...] catechesis occupies a position of importance.” Catholic Church. *Congregatio pro Clericis, General Directory for Catechesis*, 219.

¹¹ Of course, other voices will emerge in the conversation.

where “God is all in all.”¹² Drawing from Columbanus’ instruction to “live in Christ that Christ may live in you,”¹³ I term this “abiding faith.”¹⁴ Schillebeeckx noted the need to emphasize the importance of a relational/experiential Christology, “Jesus becomes a renewed and deepened question for us only if and because he is the one who has something definite and definitive to say about God and at the same time about man.”¹⁵ The evangelization of early Ireland was an undertaking that called people to a dual conversion where firstly, it was a new way of understanding life in which God through Christ was both immanent and active, and secondly, a new way of living as disciples of Jesus that flowed from that awareness. It called people to adopt an attitude that intentionally recognizes that all of life is in Christ, who, in the image of the *Lorica Patricii*, envelops and embraces life.¹⁶

This relational/experiential christological approach developed in large part due to the methodology of the early Irish evangelists. They introduced Christianity to the new converts, not simply through doctrinal formulations communicated didactically, but through the contextualization of Christianity within the framework of Irish life. For Patrick, Tirechán, and Cogitosus, belief in Christ was not an assent to ethereal

¹² 1 Cor 15:28.

¹³ *Sermon X.* Columbanus, *Sermons of Columbanus*.

¹⁴ Columbanus of course drew upon the Johannine concept of abiding in God as the basis for his sermon. The word translated as “abide” is the Greek μένω. Liddell and Scott’s *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* states that the term means “to stay, stand fast, abide, remain.” The *General Directory for Catechesis* notes that one task of catechesis is to “transmit to the disciples the attitude of the Master himself.” I propose that this transmission must result in the intentional recognition of abiding faith. Liddell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, 498. Catholic Church. Congregatio pro Clericis, *General Directory for Catechesis*, § 85.

¹⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, “The God of Jesus and the Jesus of God,” in *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church*, Concilium (Maryknoll Orbis Books 1995).

¹⁶ See Appendix 1 below for the full text of the *Lorica Patricii*.

philosophical propositions presented to the elite of Irish society. On the contrary, their writings reflected and shaped early catechetical efforts which included preaching the gospel message to peasant *and* king, using familiar images found in the daily lives of the Irish people, calling them to a holistic belief made manifest in attitude and action. In early Christian Ireland, Christology was firmly rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus but was understood through an Irish experiential lens that bore implications for both the present life as well as the life to come. The result is what Schillebeeckx terms “a Christology of ascent;”¹⁷ a Christology that does not deny the cross and resurrection but which integrates the Pre- and Post-Easter christological images to form the foundation of Christian faith.

Of the many images of Jesus Christ, the one that resonated most with life in early Ireland was that of lordship.¹⁸ The early Irish came to recognize Jesus as Lord of a kingdom that, like their own *rí*, encompassed their lives. Today the Church preaches the reign of God while seemingly failing (apart from the feast of Christ the King)¹⁹ to educate about the royal office of Jesus Christ. In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, addressing the title of ‘Lord’ for Jesus Christ, traces it not to the kingship of Christ, but to the Jewish tradition of addressing God as *Adonai*,

“Out of respect for the holiness of God, the people of Israel do not pronounce his name. In the reading of Sacred Scripture, the divine title

¹⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus, Son of God?*, (Edinburgh Clark 1982), 75.

¹⁸ See chapter 3.

¹⁹ The offices of Jesus Christ as priest, prophet and king have biblical bases and are mentioned as early as Eusebius. Eusebius Pamphilius, “Church History of Eusebius,” in *Eusebius Pamphilius: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Phillip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1900), 1:3. See also Catholic Church., *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), §783, 786.

"LORD" (in Hebrew Adonai, in Greek Kyrios) replaces the revealed divine name (YHWH). It is under this title that the divinity of Jesus will be acclaimed: 'Jesus is LORD'."

(CCC 209)

While the *Catechism* eventually refers to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, it limits its explanation to "He exercises his kingship by drawing all men [*sic*] to himself through his death and Resurrection. Christ, King and Lord of the universe, made himself the servant of all for he came 'not be served but to serve, and gave his life as ransom for many'" (CCC786). Since only two of the 2,865 sections of the entire *Catechism* explicitly address the royal office of Christ, it appears that the office of Christ as King is insignificant for Catholic faith. On the other hand, as Schillebeeckx notes, "Of the many names or honorific titles in the New Testament, only three have made their way into the creed, " Christ, God's only Son, *our Lord* (italics mine)."²⁰

Of course, while the Gospels do not present a royal Jesus *per se*²¹ (in the popular— albeit medieval—imagery of kingship as that which wields control and domination over a nation or people replete with a court of nobles), they agree that the essence of his message, the heart of Christianity, is the reign of God. Here Schillebeeckx is helpful in the Christian understanding of kingship and kingdom, "Kingdom of God, a key word in Jesus' message is the biblical expression for God's being: unconditional and

²⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *God among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed* (New York: Crossroad 1983), 103. Of course the understanding of God as "heavenly king" is also evident in the liturgy in the Major Doxology, a prayer that traces to at least the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions*. *Apostolic Constitutions*. 7:5.

²¹ There are instances where others, identify Jesus as king, e.g. the magi pay homage to the infant king (Mt 2:2); Gabriel tell Mary that her son will be a king (Lk 1:29); Nathaniel identifies Jesus as "King of Israel" (Jn 1:49). Then there are the points of coalescence between the four gospels concerning the events from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the cross where Jesus is mockingly referred to as the King of the Jews (Mt 27: 11-37, Mk 15:2-32, Lk 23:3-42, Jn 12:13-15, 18:33-19:21). In none of these instances is Jesus presented as assuming the office of king in a recognizably royal way.

liberating sovereign love, in so far as this comes into being and reveals itself in the life of men and women who do God's will."²² He continues that the reign of God:

- is the saving presence of God, active and encouraging as it is affirmed or welcomed among men and women
- takes concrete form above all in justice and peaceful relationships among individuals
- is a changed new relationship (*metanoia*) of men and women to God tangible and visible side of which is a new type of liberating relationship among men and women
- is an abolition of blatant contrast between rulers and ruled
- means that Jesus recues the poor from their sense of shame at being outcast, he restored their worth as human beings, children of God.²³

It becomes apparent that for Schillebeeckx, the reign of God of the Gospels is the polar opposite of the secular understanding of royalty and realm.

Of the Incarnation, Schillebeeckx writes that it

is not a function of humanity or of human liberation, but he is essentially a God who cares for man, with the result that the whole of Jesus' life was a 'celebration' of God's rule, and at the same time an 'orthopraxis,' in other words a praxis in accordance with the kingdom of God.²⁴

In the early Irish understanding, the Incarnation initiated the reign of God with Jesus Christ the true *ard rí* (high king). Christ's rule continued in human history after his life, death, and resurrection and was familiar because of the relationships between and Irish *rí* and his people. As Ireland became Christian, the Irish ideas of kingship transferred to form a central understanding of Christ as *ard rí* (high king).

²² Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 111.

²³ Ibid, 111-112.

²⁴ Schillebeeckx, "The God of Jesus and the Jesus of God," 101.

As chapter 1 explained, kingship for the early Irish was a sacral role in which the king, as the embodiment of the *túath*, mediated between the earthly and spiritual realities, bringing about a harmony between the two. As the fount of justice and the one who possessed the Ruler's Truth, the king made judgments not so much of veracity as of compliance with the spiritual order. In exercising his role, the Irish king offered protection from threats, natural, human, and supernatural, as well as hospitality to all the members of the *túath*. Finally, as Michael Maher notes the Irish king was "never a remote figure ... [T]he king was always among his people as well as over them."²⁵

A Christology of Christ the King is fundamental in promoting abiding faith and, therefore, is an urgent impetus towards resolving the Church's apparent bifurcation on the kingship of Christ as well as of life and faith. To approach a resolution grounded in the royal office of Jesus Christ inherently raises questions such as, "In contemporary times, is this image relevant?" and "Can we salvage a kyriocentric Christology without falling prey to the dangers of kyriarchy?"²⁶ I believe that the answer on both counts is "yes."

²⁵ Maher, "Saints and Scholars: Love of Learning in the Early Irish Church," 7.

²⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza coined the neologism 'kyriarchy' to represent "interlocking spheres of domination" often supported by concepts of lordship and which legitimize "elite relations of ruling." Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 8.

Although the understanding of the kingship of Jesus Christ is indeed biblical,²⁷ its re-emergence in the Catholic Church²⁸ is relatively recent. In 1925, the sixteenth centenary of the Council of Nicæa, Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *Qua Primas*²⁹ established the feast of Christ the King in the liturgical calendar. Turning to this document, I recognize that the language of *Qua Primas* emphasizes royal qualities that I do not wish to revive, such as *dominion* and *power* that demand *obedience*. While I would like to attribute this terminology to the global context of 1925 alone, I cannot, because it is present in the *Catechism* written sixty years later,

From the beginning of Christian history, the assertion of Christ's lordship over the world and over history has implicitly recognized that man should not submit his personal freedom in an absolute manner to any earthly power, but only to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Caesar is not "the Lord." The Church. . . believes that the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of man's history is to be found in its Lord and Master.³⁰

However, as Schillebeeckx notes, *Qua Primas* by upholding the royal power of Christ, "becomes a criticism of any ideology of power whether in the world or in the church."³¹ The rule of Christ the king, understood properly, is a "non-authoritarian, vulnerable, even

²⁷ Especially in the Matthean account where "king" or "kingdom" occurs seventy two time. Especially pertinent here are 1) the genealogy that connects Jesus to David, Ch 1), 2) the magi come to see the newborn King of the Jews (Ch 2) , 3) the anointing at Bethany (26:6-10) prepares Jesus for a royal death, and 4) Jesus' affirmation to Pilate that he is indeed the King of the Jews (27:11). Not to confuse earthly kingship with the divine rule of Christ, Matthew employs the term, "kingdom of heaven" thirty two time, a phrase not found elsewhere in the New Testament.

²⁸ John Calvin wrote of the three-fold office of priest, prophet, and king in the *Institutes*. Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*., ed. John T. MacNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, 4th ed., 2 vols., vol. 2 (Philadelphia: 1967), pt 16 ch 15.

²⁹ Pius XI, *Qua Primas* (Catholic Church, 1925 [cited 30 May 2008]); available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_11121925_quas-primas_en.html.

³⁰ Catholic Church., *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 450.

³¹ Schillebeeckx, *God among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed*, 118.

helpless rule of God”³² inverts understandings of power, and renders domination and control the antithesis of the gospel message.

Yet, texts such as these open the door for charges of kyriarchy, which according to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is, “best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiple social structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression.”³³ Historically, the royal office of Christ has been understood in a kyriarchical manner, validating concerns against a renewal of attention to Christ the King. As early as the fourth century, the title *Pantocrater* became widespread for Jesus Christ and connoted a dominating, powerful, remote ruler of worldly affairs. As Jaroslav Pleikan explains,

At the hands of Eusebius, this historical and theological interpretation of Constantine’s victory and kingship as an achievement of Christ the Victor and King through the sign of his cross became a full-blown theology of history and an apologia for the idea of a Christian Roman empire.³⁴

This imagery evolved into the persona of Charlemagne, the first Christian Emperor and continues in some fashion today.³⁵

The gospel images of Christ’s royalty bear out Schillebeeckx’s observation that the kingship of Jesus is a model of love and service. In the Matthean infancy narrative,

³² Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, 221.

³³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll Orbis Books, 2001), 211.

³⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven Yale University Press, 1999), 51.

³⁵ Christ the Pantocrater dominates the wall behind the high altar of the Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC, a structure built in the 1950’s.

the magi seek out the newborn king in a shelter for animals, not in a palace.³⁶ In the Palm Sunday accounts found in *Matthew*, *Luke*, and *John*, Jesus' "triumphal entry to Jerusalem" occurs on a donkey (colt) not on a litter.³⁷ In the trial of Jesus before Pilate, as well as on the cross, the title "King of the Jews" serves as a weapon of mockery not an indication of honor.³⁸ In the Johannine text, Jesus withdraws *to prevent* his followers from making him their king.³⁹ In these brief examples, it is clear that the royal office of Jesus does not align with understandings of imperial authority exerted through force .

Qua Primas is also rich with imagery of kingship that echoes that of the early Irish: Christ as king (and Lord) is the law-giver who promises that those who observe the laws will abide in his love. Additionally, he is the judge who, not only punishes, but also offers the blessings of liberty, peace, and harmony.⁴⁰ While the kingship of Christ is a principal belief that binds the faithful together,⁴¹ it is, at the same time, that which joins the will, heart, body, and soul of believers to form "instruments of justice unto God."⁴² From these examples, it become apparent that that the power and authority of the Christ the King is not that of the sword or domination, but, as Thomas Aquinas writes, "The

³⁶ Mt 2:2

³⁷ Mt 21:5; Lk 19:28; Jn 12:13.

³⁸ Mt 27:29,37; Mk 15:18, 32; Lk 23:3.

³⁹ Jn 6:15.

⁴⁰ Pius XI, *Qua Primas*.§14, 19.

⁴¹ Ibid.§19

⁴² Ibid.§33. See also Rm.6:13 .

power and rule of Christ over human beings is exercised by truth, justice, and above all, love.”⁴³

There are those who emphasize a future eschatological understanding of the kingship of Christ. Wolfhart Pannenberg is an example of this position, declaring “Jesus is the eschatological ruler”⁴⁴ whose resurrection served “as his installation into the office of *Kyrios*.”⁴⁵ While this statement offers an understanding of the cross and resurrection, it is only part of the totality of the royal office of Christ. Following Schillebeeckx’s “Christology of ascent,”⁴⁶ as the lens to understand who Christ is and what Christ does, the Incarnation *must* be the starting point, “I reject the interpretation that Jesus’ death represents universal salvation. Jesus’ message and conduct must be included in his life.”⁴⁷ Understood this way, the Incarnation is the inception of the reign of God in Christ, an approach that includes the life and ministry of Jesus as evidence of his kingship,⁴⁸ a view with which the early Irish would agree.

With this recovered perspective on kingship, it becomes possible to view the ministry of Jesus Christ as a model of kingship that, like the Irish, does not succumb to

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas *III Sent.* d13, q2 as quoted in Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, 222.

⁴⁴ Although Pannenberg understands the resurrection as the installation to the royal office, he does continue that “Further, because Jesus as the eschatological revealer of God belongs inseparably to God himself, his eschatological Lordship could no longer be restricted to the future [...]. Lordship already given in God’s eternity and therefore is also effect for the present.” Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 365, 367.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁴⁶ See n17 above.

⁴⁷ *All Humanity Is the Elect People of God: An Interview with Edvard Schillebeeckx* (Die Presse, 1997 [cited 30 May 2008]); available from www.mbtranslations.com/articles.

⁴⁸ This position is also one that Henri de Lubac held. See Henri de Lubac, *Christian Faith: The Structure of the Apostles’ Creed*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 86.

ideas of domination and power, but accompaniment and solidarity. Yet, the Irish king was not simply a companion but one who governed. The word “govern” comes from the Greek κυβερνᾶν (kybernan) meaning, “to steer (a vessel), to direct.”⁴⁹ In this sense, the kingship of Jesus Christ becomes understood as his *governance*, where, just as Jesus proclaimed that the “reign of God is at hand.”⁵⁰ Jesus guided his disciples by walking among them, and expanded their understanding of the covenantal relationship, the rule of God. Again turning to Schillebeeckx, “Jesus did not proclaim any teaching, any doctrine; he issued a summons to responsible action, to repentance, in the light of the approaching rule of God which would consist in liberating freedom and *shalom* for all.”⁵¹ Christians today, therefore, can acknowledge the kingship of Jesus Christ as the abiding presence that directs their lives in love, justice, and *shalom*.

The governance of Christ guides believers in the covenantal relationship of love of God and neighbor as well as in the justice that flows from God’s love for the world – grace. Because the reign of God is both already present and a future reality instituted by the Incarnation and continued in the Resurrection, it can be said that, “grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God.”⁵² It follows then that participation in the “active love” of Christ for the world occurs in the day-to-day lives of believers where implicit acknowledgement that, as “king,” Jesus Christ, governs their lives. As Jon Sobrino writes, the reign of God

⁴⁹ “Govern,” in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ Mk 1:15

⁵¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, “Jesus the Prophet,” in *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 43.

⁵² Catholic Church., *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2011.

is “manifested in the note of service attaching to the lives of believers and the efficacy of that service for the world.”⁵³ The recognition that the reign of God is both present in time and transcends time, offers persons of faith today—as it was with the early Irish Church—not only a sense of harmonization of the temporal and cosmological worlds, but also a validation that, by leading lives in concert with their Christian faith, their lives *become* the prayer; “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”⁵⁴

Adopting the Irish royal model of a king as one who governs from a position of accompaniment, the kingship of Christ becomes one where his “leadership functions as integrating, enabling, focusing, facilitating, inspiring, empowering and challenging ministry to the community.”⁵⁵ Schillebeeckx observes, “For Jesus, the rule of God is a matter of de-theocratizing. Human society must always respond in the light of the rule of God which never enslaves or oppresses but brings freedom, and thus relieves any suffering which is caused by human powers.”⁵⁶ In this vein, a kyriocentric Christology excludes previous kyriarchical structures of domination and power. Christ the king, the one who governs one’s life in love and justice, is a leader who directs believers to live abundantly⁵⁷ because he calls for their full participation in his kingdom. This entails a stance of “active love” that is intimately connected to the spiritual sphere. In this manner,

⁵³ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll Orbis Books, 1987), 155. This, of course, is the sentiment of Jesus’ instructions to the Sons of Thunder who, unwittingly envisioned the rule of God as one of power and domination, “‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.’” Mt 20:25-27

⁵⁴ Mt 6:10

⁵⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-Logy of Liberation*, 230.

⁵⁶ Schillebeeckx, “Jesus the Prophet,” 36.

⁵⁷ Jn 10:10

understanding the royal office of Christ is relevant today, because it transforms understandings of kingship to one rooted in love rather than domination; thereby promoting an abiding faith that integrates faith and life.

Walk the Ways of Christ: Living in Covenant

The “active love” that unites believer and Christ also unites believers to one another in their service for the reign of God. These relationships, both with Christ and with one another, are grounded in an understanding of covenant. In common parlance, a covenant is “a mutual agreement or promise;” however, when one examines the biblical etymology, it takes on the added sense of God’s engagement with humanity.⁵⁸ Taken together covenant connotes God’s commitment to interact with humanity in order to bring about God’s reign—salvation. Divine involvement in salvation history began in the

⁵⁸ “The Heb. word *b r th* is also the ordinary term for a contract, agreement, alliance, or league between men. It is constantly rendered in the Septuagint by ‘disposition, distribution, arrangement’, which occurs in Aristophanes in the sense ‘convention, arrangement between parties’, but usually in cl. Gr. meant ‘disposition by will, testament’. Accordingly, the Old Latin translation of the Bible (Itala) appears to have uniformly rendered by *testamentum*, while Jerome translated the Heb. by *fdus* and *pactum* indifferently. Hence, in the Vulgate, the O.T. has the old rendering *testamentum* in the (Gallican) Psalter, but Jerome’s renderings *fdus*, *pactum* elsewhere; the N.T. has always *testamentum*. In English Wyclif strictly followed the Vulgate, rendering *fdus*, *pactum*, by *boond*, *covenaunt*, rather indiscriminately, *testamentum* in the Psalter and N.T. always by *testament*. So the versions of Rheims and Douay. The 16th c. English versions at length used *covenant* entirely in O.T. (including the Psalter), and Tindale introduced it into 6 places in the N.T. These the Geneva extended to 23, and the Bible of 1611 to 22 (in 2 of which Gen. had *testament*), leaving *testament* in 14 (in 3 of which Gen. had *covenant*). The Revised Version of 1881 has substituted *covenant* in 12 of these, leaving *testament* in 2 only (Heb. ix. 16, 17).

Thus *b r th*, *fdus* (*pactum*), *covenant* are applied to God’s engagement with Noah and his posterity, Gen. vi. 18, ix. 9—17; to that made with Abraham and his posterity, Gen. xvii, of which the token was circumcision; to the institution of the Mosaic Law, Exod. xxiv. 7, 8, and to that law or its observance itself, whence the expressions *book of the covenant* (i.e. of the law), *ark of the covenant*, *blood of the covenant* (i.e. of beasts ritually sacrificed), *land of the covenant* (= promised land, Canaan). The covenant with the Israelites, in its various phases, is commonly called the *Old Covenant*, in contrast to which the prophets made promise of a *new covenant*, Jer. xxxi. 31; and this name *New Covenant* (*testament*) was, according to St. Luke xxii. 20, applied by Jesus to the new relation to man which God had established in Him. In this sense it is also used by St. Paul and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who contrast these two covenants (Gal. iv. 24, Heb. viii. 13, ix. 15, etc.), also called by commentators the *Temporal* and the *Eternal Covenant* (see Heb. xiii. 20).” “Covenant,” in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

act of creation, continued in the experiences of ancient Israel, and culminated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sending of the Paraclete at Pentecost assures believers that the covenantal relationship between humanity and God continues.⁵⁹

Jesus Christ, the one who, according to Sobrino, “mediates God and helps to construct a better society,”⁶⁰ invites all of humanity to active participation in the reign of God. Schillebeeckx clarifies the connection between Christian faith and covenantal relationship. He writes, “The notion of mediatorship shows us that men [*sic*] are dependent upon one another and that God, in bringing his transcendent salvation means to preserve the structure of human fellowship,”⁶¹ a structure of covenant. Through lives of discipleship or “walking” the ways of Christ⁶² in love of God, self, and neighbor, Christians make the covenant a lived reality.

Michael Horton has written extensively in an effort to reclaim a covenantal theology for the 21st century. In *Lord and Servant: A Covenantal Christology*, he claims that the first covenant between God and humanity was not the Noahide covenant of *Genesis 9*, but the act of creation,

The God—world bond is not ontologically but covenantally constituted. Neither independence (deism), nor absorption (pantheism), but *relation*: it is ethical not ontological. The world is not divine, nor demonic, nor

⁵⁹ I do not mean to imply a supercessionist theology of the Trinity by this brief description. Rather, I wish to demonstrate that the covenantal relationship between God and humanity is one that engages each of the Three Persons of the Trinity .

⁶⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (Maryknoll Orbis Books, 1978), 383.

⁶¹ Schillebeeckx, "The Church and Mankind," 73.

⁶² Here I adapt Raymond Brown's description of discipleship, "The way of Jesus is the way of the disciple, and discipleship consists in walking the way with Jesus." Raymond Edward Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 95.

illusory. It is neither God's emanation nor God's enemy. It is an other that God creates as a partner for ethical communion.⁶³

Horton's premise that creation is the first act of covenant allows for a discussion of what he terms a "covenantal anthropology." The shift from creation as an ontological to an ethical movement on the part of God "resituates selfhood in the 'lived experience' of covenant and eschatology,"⁶⁴ and allows personhood to include "otherness, relatedness, ethical responsibility, [and] embodiment."⁶⁵ By placing covenant within the act of creation, God's love becomes the impetus or root of the covenantal relationship. The love that burst through in creation is a passionate love that draws persons to Christ and compels hearts to seek justice. Accordingly, covenant becomes as intrinsic to humanness as does the *imago dei* that Horton defines as the "covenantal office or commission into which every person is born."⁶⁶

This ethical principle of covenantal relationship undergirds the faith identity of the early Christian Irish. In order to fully appreciate the Irish wisdom, however, further exploration of the Judeo-Christian concept of covenant will be helpful.

The Hebrew Scriptures contain several accounts of covenants between God and the People of God.⁶⁷ These accounts typically represent covenantal relationship as one where God, as suzerain, demands obedience from the people of Israel, portrayed as

⁶³ Michael Scott Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology*, 1st ed. (Louisville Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 84.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 92.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 94.

⁶⁷ Of course there are many informal or lesser covenants, but it is beyond the scope of this work to offer a discussion of all of the biblical covenants. Therefore, I will confine my examination to the major, formal covenants.

subordinates. Although it is true that the influence of ancient Hittite treaties provides the foundation for these representations, upon a closer examination, the covenant accounts demonstrate God's love for Israel rather than its subjugation. Biblical scholar Aelred Lacomara notes, "When Moses exhorts the people to be loyal to Yahweh because of all that he has done for them, he is appealing to the evidence of God's love and urging the Israelites to return to that love."⁶⁸ In other words, God calls people into covenant, expecting not their submission and blind obedience, but their response in love.

In the Noahide episode,⁶⁹ after the world has been deluged with water, death, and destruction, God makes known that all of creation, both human and animal, is under the protection of God. With Abraham, the premier Patriarch, God offers the threefold gift of progeny, land, and blessings.⁷⁰ After the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, God calls the Israelites into the covenant of the Decalogue. This covenant not only dispels confusion concerning the identity of God ("I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt"⁷¹), but also provides direction for the new society that formed in the freedom offered by a loving God.⁷² With the final Hebrew covenant found in the prophecy of Jeremiah, God declares a "new covenant" promising that the relationship between God and humanity will be so intimate that the will of God will be inscribed in the hearts of the faithful. As a result, the people will know that they belong to God (and

⁶⁸ Aelred Lacomara, "Deuteronomy and the Farewell Discourses (John 13:31-16:33)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 72.

⁶⁹ Gn 9.

⁷⁰ Gn 15-17.

⁷¹ Ex 20:21

⁷² Ex 34:27-28, Dt 4:13, 5:2-22

God to them), and that this relationship will endure despite their failings. Protection, people-hood, blessings, right relationship, and belonging despite human propensity to sin, are the marks of the covenantal relationship between God and the People of God presented in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Of course, the people-hood of Israel passed down through the Jewish tradition and texts, bears a sense of election as the “Chosen People” of God, an exclusionary image that I do not wish to revive. Schillebeeckx, like the evangelist Luke, understood that “all humanity is the elect people of God, ... I also know that the idea of election by God includes mediation and universality *without any partiality* threatening humanity.”⁷³ He continued, “if any group deserved the title of ‘Chosen’, it is, in fitting with the ministry of Jesus, the poor, the oppressed, and the rejected “non-persons of society.”⁷⁴ Therefore, I embrace Schillebeeckx’s proposal that all are the “people of God”

Covenantal themes continue in the Christian scriptures. In *Luke*, Jesus presents the cup of “the blood of the new covenant.”⁷⁵ Further, the prayer of Jesus in *John 17* gathers many of the covenantal aspects from the Hebrew Scriptures and situates their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Here Jesus, the Christ of the covenant, gathers the believers into a people of faith, prays for their protection and blessings, reveals God, and underscores the foundation of the covenant, love.⁷⁶

⁷³ *All Humanity Is the Elect People of God: An Interview with Edvard Schillebeeckx.*

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Lk 22:20

⁷⁶ While I have focused here on the gospel treatment of covenant, I do recognize the more than thirty references to covenant (outside the *Gospels*) in the Christian scriptures.. However many of these instances conflate covenant with Law with the former rendering the latter obsolete for the Christian. This approach is

The concentration on love continues in the Johannine Passover discourse where Jesus instructs his followers, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”⁷⁷ Commonly referred to as the *Law of Love*, here Jesus teaches that love is the explicit connection between covenantal stipulation (commandment) and discipleship. Yet, Jesus’ commandment is more than a call to obedience to the *νομος* (law); it is a call to fidelity in relationship where there is mutual intimacy with God, with Jesus, and with one another. It is a call to covenant. This “new covenant” of Christianity does not obfuscate the covenants of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁷⁸ On the contrary, the *newness* of the covenant of Christ is that it brings unity to the covenantal relationship between God and humanity. No longer are there many covenants; Christ brings all into *the* covenant that is God’s pledge for engagement with humanity, to bring about the reign of God.

The survey of early Irish society in chapter 1 presented a snapshot image of the relationship between the *rí* and the *túath* as one of mutual respect and trust in which each party would carry out its responsibilities. This resulted in a bond characterized as intimate as that of marriage. Although the taxonomical approach to Irish society included definitive hierarchical connotations, accompaniment, solidarity, and reciprocity are key markers of the relationship between *rí* and *túath*. Through the lens of the above

not helpful to the understanding of covenant as presented here, therefore, I have not included these passages in the discussion. .

⁷⁷ Jn 13:33—34.

⁷⁸ Contrary to the anti-Jewish sentiment of *Hebrews*, “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.” Heb.8:13.

discussion of covenant, it becomes apparent that the Irish societal responsibilities grew out of an implicit covenantal paradigm.

The recognition of the Irish societal covenant, however, is not simply a matter of overlaying either the biblical model on Irish society (or the reverse) in order to ascertain points of resonance. While this effort may indeed add to the discussion, care must be taken not to reduce the two cultures into a homogenous, interchangeable blur that obscures their particularities. Drawing from the Hittite culture where the king was a strong religious, military and political leader, the biblical texts present the image of God as suzerain who required obedience of the people in all aspects of life in order to receive the blessings of God. In the Irish model, the king commanded respect and, at the same time, acted in an intimate solidarity with the people. In both instances, there is an underlying sense of bilateral movement in the covenantal relationship.

The *rí* of the Irish context pledged protection, hospitality, true judgments, and mediation with the spiritual order. In exchange, the *túath* pledged to bear arms, provide dues, tithes, and hospitality to the *ri* and his retinue in their travels. The biblical covenants demonstrate that God indeed provides, protects, and blesses the people who agree to proper worship, love of God through right relationship with neighbor, and to bear responsibility for the marginalized members of society. For both contexts, Irish and biblical, the roles of the parties to the covenant cannot be neatly characterized as equal or hierarchical. They present a “both-and” situation, reiterating the Irish legal text that, “the king is of higher status, although they are of equal status; for it is the *túath* which ordains

a king, it is not a king who ordains a *túath*.”⁷⁹ Or, as Horton claims, the covenant relationship is “a constitutional rather than absolutist monarchy.”⁸⁰

In creation, God pledged an enduring engagement with the world. Because humanity is part of the created order, covenant must bear ontological consequences⁸¹ that render personal and faith identities inseparable. Faith formation that calls attention to covenant promotes a sense of ethical interdependence, whereby the unity of the relationship between God and humanity is realized through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It also offers an awareness that, love of God and neighbor not only fulfills the covenant, but also brings about the fullness of what it means to be human.

Inseparable but Unconfused Union: Church as Community

The third component of the Irish triad, community, is the milieu where persons come together to celebrate, nourish, and understand life. American philosopher Josiah Royce, in *The Problem of Christianity* writes that communities serve as interpreters of reality.⁸² Schillebeeckx, too, highlights the interpretative activity of the faith community, stating that the transmission of the gospel, “is possible only in and through the mediation of the church. In and through the church, through the mediation of fellow men and

⁷⁹ Binchy, ed., *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, § 568.537-568.

⁸⁰ Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology*, 27.

⁸¹ Horton moved the covenant of creation from an ontological movement on the part of God to an ethical one. Here I propose that this movement, created an ontological response on the part of humanity. In effect, the ontological aspect does not reveal God’s being but humanity’s.

⁸² Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, Reprint of 1916 ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 315-316, 337-339.

women, we continue to hear the story of Jesus.”⁸³ Taking this a step further, I propose that faith communities interpret both the reality of the Christian Story/Vision *and* the experiences of daily life so that each enhances and illuminates the other. This mutual hermeneutic exposes both “the sphere in which the intelligibility of God and of our speaking about God,” and is necessary “if we are to avoid a meaningless fideism.”⁸⁴

The referent of “church” for the faith community has an interesting etymology. From the earliest Christian times, there were two terms denoting “faith community”, *ἐκκλησία* and *κυριακή*. Recovery of the former, *ecclesia*, meaning “assembly” or “gathering” is prevalent in feminist theology, especially in the work of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. The retrieval of the early meaning of the latter, *κυριακή*, however, remains obscure and, for the most part, forgotten. *Κυριακή* is a compound of two words, *κύριος* (lord) and *οικία* (house). Taken together they literally mean “the lord’s house” or, as Schillebeeckx translates it, “belonging to the Lord.”⁸⁵ It becomes possible, therefore, to claim that the community of faith, the church, is the gathering of the household that belongs to the Lord. This understanding naturally leads to a discussion of the nature and scope of community as well its applicability to the understandings of church.

What constitutes a community? Here Royce provides a starting point. He claims that communities are organic entities,

⁸³ Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, 103.

⁸⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, “[Untitled],” in *The Crucial Questions on Problems Facing the Church Today*, ed. Frank Fehmers (New York,: Newman Press, 1969), 51, 53.

⁸⁵ While Schillebeeckx offers a brief treatment, the OED provides a complete etymology. Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, 146. “Church,” in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

A community is not a mere collection of individuals. It is a sort of live unit that has organs, as the body of an individual has organs. A community grows or decays, is healthy or diseased, is young or aged, much as any individual member of the community possesses such characters. Each of the two, the community, or the individual member is as much a live creature as is the other.⁸⁶

The vitality of community is one that permeates the ecclesiology of Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac. In *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, he proclaims, “The Church lives!”⁸⁷ Drawing upon Teilhard de Chardin’s image of the church as the “the vibrant Axis of life,” de Lubac explains that the “living Church” works, prays (both actively and contemplatively), remembers, searches, believes, hopes, and loves.⁸⁸ The church, as the community of faith, is a living entity recognized through the lives and actions of its members.

The activity of the church as community distinguishes it from a simple collective of persons brought together by circumstances of place and time, such as audience members at a play or subway riders. Unlike a collective of persons, members of the church-community⁸⁹ join together, by sharing a mutual mystery, as Royce states,

[L]et each one of them ideally enlarge his own individual life, extending himself into the past and future, so as to say, of some far off event, belonging, perhaps to other generations of men, ‘I view that event as part of my own life.’ ‘That former happening or achievement so predetermined the sense and the destiny which are now mine that I am moved to regard it

⁸⁶ Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 80.

⁸⁷ Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1969), 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid, esp. 2-5.

⁸⁹ Because I have presented the intention to identify the church as a community, and to avoid cumbersome, repetitive referents between faith community, community, and church, from this point forward I will use ‘church-community’ as an inclusive term.

as belonging to my own past.’ Or again, ‘For that coming event I wait and hope as an event of my own future.’⁹⁰

A shared past and common future, such as the Christian Story/Vision, unites the members of the community; it provides them with a unity that transcends moments of physical togetherness. From this unicity, the church-community as a living organism progresses towards the commonly held future of itself and of its members.

Those who belong to the church-community claim identity as children of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, brought together by the love of God in Christ, whose ministry furthers the reign of God in the world and in the life to come. This communal identity does not subsume the distinction of persons bound together in the church-community. Rather, it demonstrates conviviality in that the plurality of members in the interdependent relationship creates a new entity, namely the church-community that incorporates the personal identities into itself while maintaining their distinct particularities. As French sociologist Emile Durkheim explains, “1+1 = 2, not a set of 1 and 1.”⁹¹

This sense of collective identity within the church-community is of course a traditional one that began with the earliest Christian writings. The metaphor of a body and members— one yet distinct, as in the Body of Christ, permeates several of the Pauline epistles:

⁹⁰ Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 252.

⁹¹ Emile Durkheim, *Moral Education; a Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 61.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.⁹²

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.⁹³

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.⁹⁴

De Lubac, using a Eucharistic paradigm, explains, "Just as the body of Christ is in each particle of the Host, so the Church—the whole Church—is behind the face of every Christian."⁹⁵ Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, offers, "Wherever individuals recognize themselves both as individuals and as the human race, and submit to the demands of God, there beats the heart of the collective person."⁹⁶ Whatever the metaphor, image, or explanation, the church-community is, to use de Lubac's term, both "paradox and mystery."⁹⁷ It is both the one and the many, the visible and the invisible, in balance and without either in prominence or suppression, an ecclesiological *communicatio idomatum*.

⁹² Rm. 12:4-5.

⁹³ 1 Cor. 12:14.

⁹⁴ Eph.4:11-13, 15-16.

⁹⁵ de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 18.

⁹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., 16 vols., vol. 1, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 121.

⁹⁷ de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*.

The model of early Irish society demonstrates how the paradox between individual and communal identities can become a concrete reality. The survey in chapter 1 highlighted the importance of the *fine* as the first level of social groupings. Together, the many *fine* that comprised the *túath* held land in common and came to agreement on permissions for the members to enter into contracts outside the *fine* or *túath*. This collective sense of actions permeated all the levels of the social strata up to the king, who was the *enech* (face) or embodiment of the *túath*. He mediated the identity and will of the *túath* in relations with other *túatha* as well as with the spiritual world. In the Irish schema, identity as a member of the *túath* was inseparable from personal identity, and personal identity was integral to the identity of the *túath*.

How can one distinguish between persons in a genuine community of relationship, (although paradoxical) and those simply gathered as a collective? Royce offers several identifiers of community. The first is the possibility for “the individual self to extend his life, in an ideal fashion, so as to regard it as including past and future events which lie far away in time and which he [*sic*] does not now personally remember.”⁹⁸ This extension of the self entails a change in the understanding of self and one’s role in time, what John Markey terms the taking on of “the “vaster and richer consciousness of the community.”⁹⁹ Here, persons understand the interdependence of not only the present interaction with others, but also of the past (as well as the future) of all. Through expanding the person’s relationship with the past to include an adoption of the

⁹⁸ Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 253.

⁹⁹ John J. Markey, *Creating Communion: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church* (Hyde Park New City Press, 2003), 131.

community's past into the personal social location, personal identity emerges from a symbiotic interaction between social location and experience which unites the communal and the individual spheres of life.

Royce's notes that "... community does not become one, in the sense of my definition, by virtue of any reduction or melting of the various selves into a single merely present self, or into a mass of passing experiences."¹⁰⁰ This leads to the other identifier, engaged social communication. It is helpful to note that communication between the members of the church-community (as well as between the church-community and other communities) is an act that transcends, but does not abrogate the self. Engaged social communication recognizes the parties in the communication as individual subjects who are, at the same time, a unity. In ecclesiological understanding this is the communion of the body of Christ of the Pauline texts (above).

The church-community allows for taking on the conscience of the community when it fulfills its duty, as Schillebeeckx claims, to "proclaim and practice the liberating power of the Christian message credibly and understandably."¹⁰¹ This can only happen when the Christian Story/Vision is accessible and relevant to lives of its members. Further, proclamation and praxis must be re-interpreted as acts of communication, replete with meaning and in full recognition of the intersubjectivity of the members with one another as well as with the gospel message. Here, the early Irish also provide model. The approach of the *filid* in retelling the Irish myths was both *anamnesis* and engagement.

¹⁰⁰ Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 255-256.

¹⁰¹ Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, 222.

The *filid* were both the guardians of tradition passing on the communal memories as well as the composers of the collective hope for a common future. Proclamation and praxis of the Christian tradition should likewise contain a vitality that integrates past, present, and future rather than serve as an enshrinement of a disembodied past in a mausoleum-like memory.

According to Bonhoeffer, the church-community is the ongoing revelation of God in which, “the love of God, in Christ’s vicarious representative action restores the community between God and human beings, so the community of human beings with each other has also become a reality in love again.”¹⁰² As an organic reality, it is the “realm of God which actualizes itself on earth under the constitution of the new covenant.”¹⁰³ It is, in an Irish *resourcement* ecclesiological model: a community of covenant under the guidance of Christ the king.

Abiding Faith

What can a reclaiming of covenantal relationship integrated with a kyriocentric Christology add to the discussion of faith identity for the community of believers today? Turning again to Schillebeeckx, “Sometimes we have destroyed not only the unity between creation and covenant, but also belief in creation itself, and that means breaking the thread of life which links Christian faith with our experience of reality.”¹⁰⁴ Recognition that creation is not only a revelation of God but also a covenantal, ethical movement of God, places all of human experience within the parameters of that

¹⁰² Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, 218.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 810.

covenant. The result renders the compartmentalization of faith and life contrary to the natural, logical, loving, order of creation. Faith and life are not two separate realities that the believer has to negotiate; they are an integrated ethical unity governed by God in Christ through love and justice.

Persons of faith who acknowledge this integration and governance are able to adopt (as did the early Christian Irish) abiding faith, a posture that derives faith identity from the realization that,

- 1) God pledged engagement with humanity at the moment of creation,
- 2) This movement of God was not primarily an ontological act meant to reveal knowledge of God, but an ethical movement of God,
- 3) The Incarnation as well as the Resurrection are events in which God in Christ calls humanity to full participation in reign of God,
- 4) Jesus Christ, governs the kingdom of God in love and justice rather than power and domination, and,
- 5) The church-community is the visible, ongoing revelation of God's engagement with humanity.

Living with abiding faith, one understands that faith not only permeates all aspects of life, but also calls believers to recognize the governance of Christ the Lord who directs them in service of God, neighbor, and creation. In other words, it calls them to understand that God abides in lives of discipleship.

Each of these suppositions rests upon the principle that ethics precedes ontology. While not the first to propose this philosophical stance, in *Ethics as First Philosophy*¹⁰⁵ the 20th century philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas provides the best explanation of this principle in a way that helps clarify abiding faith. Lévinas claims that placing ethics prior to ontology does not reject the importance of ontology, only its *primacy*. This placement moves from a privileging of the present where the self “grasps and possesses”

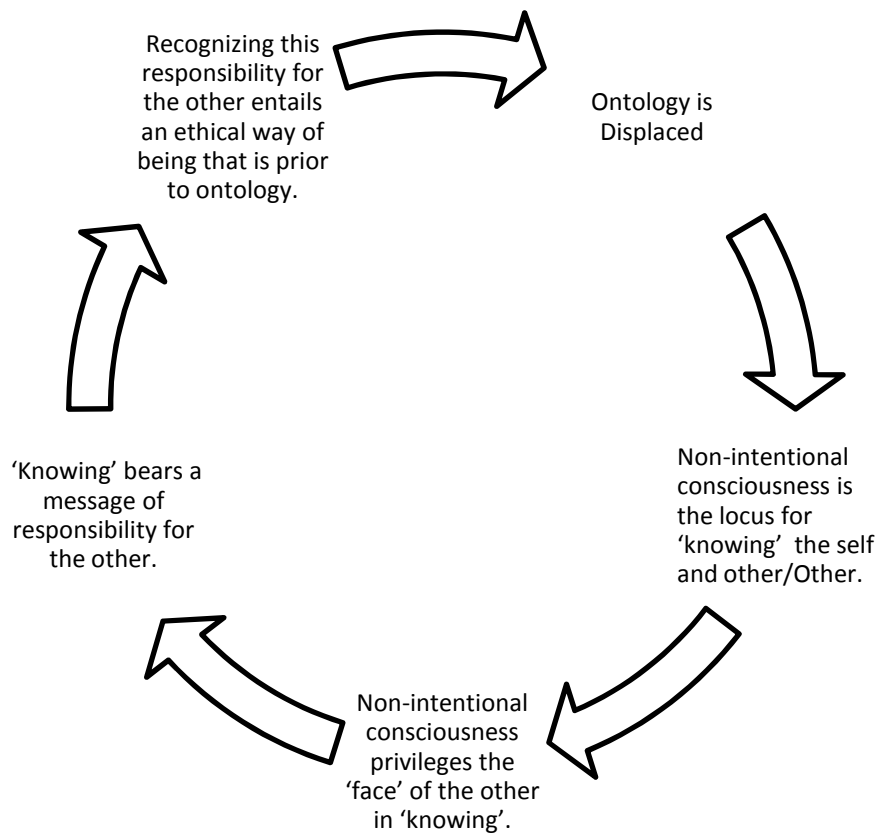


Figure 15 Movements of Ethics as First Philosophy

¹⁰⁵ Emmanuel Lévinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

knowledge,¹⁰⁶ to “the spontaneity of non—intentional consciousness that precedes any formulation of metaphysical ideas”¹⁰⁷ that privileges the face of the other. (Fig. 15) Movement from the self to the other incurs responsibility for the other; a responsibility of “love without concupiscence.”¹⁰⁸ A replacement of ethics before ontology undergirds abiding faith in that it promotes the understanding that the ethical relations between God and humanity—covenant—reveal the true essence of God *and* of humanity.

Covenantal relationship between God and creation, between Christ and the believer, is a gift of prevenient grace, in other words, God’s *apriori* gift precedes human action. Through this gift, both blessings from God and responsibility on the part of the believer become apparent. For Lévinas, responsibility is “the vocation of life”¹⁰⁹ that responds to the “summons of the other,”¹¹⁰ be it God, neighbor, or creation. The call and response of the ethical relations between Creator and creation provides the “ontological bridge”¹¹¹ between God, as wholly Other, and humanity. Traversing the bridge in relationship with God permits believers to also transcend “other-ness” with neighbor and humanity thereby recognizing a unity that does not require homogeneity.

Responsibility typically connotes an imposition; however in the Lévinasian sense, responsibility is guiltless,¹¹² it is not a responsibility of domination but of liberation that

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 76.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 82.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 85.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 83.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology*, 85.

¹¹² Lévinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” 83.

is not necessitated *by* the other, rather it is the response *for* the other, “[m]y responsibility for the other” Lévinas claims, “is the *for* of the relationship.”¹¹³ In this understanding, the stipulations of the covenantal relationship between God in Christ and believers are responsibilities that free persons of faith from inclinations of the ego to allow *for* full participation in the reign of God:

- You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, might and your neighbor as yourself.¹¹⁴
- The imperative to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the imprisoned.¹¹⁵
- Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.¹¹⁶
- A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”¹¹⁷

A shift to faith formation grounded in abiding faith offers release from ego-centric faith identity allowing for an ethos-centric one. In situating ethics as the primary approach to forming persons in faith, the call to full participation in the reign of God, as disciples of Christ the King, becomes the point of integration of faith and life. In this manner, faith resonates with life, while life experiences illuminate and strengthen faith.

Catechesis for Christ the King, Covenant, and Community

A shift in the primary foci¹¹⁸ of faith formation from creed, code, and cult to the triad of Christ the king, covenant, and community offers depth to Christian identity,

¹¹³ Ibid, 90.

¹¹⁴ Mt 22:37—39, Mk12:29—30, Lk 10:27.

¹¹⁵ Mt 25:31—46

¹¹⁶ Mt 28:18—20

¹¹⁷ Jn 13:34—35.

meaning for day to day experiences, and renewal for the community-church. Religious educator Maria Harris offers the image of ‘fashioning’ people in faith, which echoes the wisdom recovered from the early Irish Church. She wrote,

One Christian is no Christian; we go to God together or we do not go at all. In terms of fashioning a people, this works by giving us three aspects of community: as a governing reality; as a convicting reality; and as as-yet-unrealized and incomplete reality.¹¹⁹

Yet, how do we “fashion a people” of faith in a time when “The chief problem for life in a pluralistic, secular, technological, urban world is attaining, owning, and maintaining one’s identity as a person and follower of Jesus Christ?”¹²⁰ This section examines the possibility of forming people in abiding faith¹²¹ through a dialogical process integrating the wisdom from the early Irish Church with contemporary religious educators including Thomas Groome, Maria Harris, Bernard Marthaler, Gabriel Moran and Lewis Sherrill.

Formation for the Kingdom of God

A kyriocentric Christology, as discussed above, demonstrates that Jesus Christ, as Lord, calls persons of faith into full, active, participation both in and for the reign of God. The lineaments of educating for the sovereignty of Christ lies in the recognition that there

¹¹⁸ While in the Introduction I highlighted the initiatory aspects of creed, code, and cult, I recognize that faith formation is a lifelong process. Therefore, the following discussion aims at the broader, across-the-life- spectrum view of faith formation.

¹¹⁹ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 77.

¹²⁰ Although written thirty years ago, this remains an apt description of life today. Gwen Kennedy Neville and John H. Westerhoff, *Learning through Liturgy* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 103.

¹²¹ Here the discussion will be an intentionally broad one of religious educational philosophy and general pedagogical methodology for faith formation focused on Christ the king, covenant, and community. In chapter 5, I offer a detailed example grounded in the Shared Christian Praxis Approach of Thomas Groome.

exists a discipline, meaning “instruction given to disciples,”¹²² that governs life. In Durkheim’s view, “[a]ll discipline has a double objective: to promote a certain regularity in people’s conduct, and to provide them with determinate goals.”¹²³ The discipline of the lordship of Christ “has nothing to do with insidiously inculcating a spirit of resignation;¹²⁴ on the contrary, it empowers and guides persons of faith in the way of discipleship according to the “requirements and comments contained in the Gospel message”¹²⁵

Lewis Sherrill, a Presbyterian minister and religious educator, centered his theory of religious education on the concept of self. For Sherrill, there are four “marks of a self,” vitality, self-determination, self-consciousness, and self-transcendence.¹²⁶ Pedagogy for a kyriocentric understanding of Jesus Christ that empowers disciples must be attentive to these “marks.” The first, vitality, recognizes and upholds the unity between body and soul that countermands the “separation of religion from life in many of the very quarters where the Bible is most highly revered,”¹²⁷ namely the community of Christian faith. Jesus Christ, the Lord, acknowledging the vitality of the self (body and soul) calls believers to full, *embodied* participation in the reign of God.

The second and third marks, self-determination and self-consciousness, are closely related. A person of faith, “becoming aware that he [*sic*] is a self among selves in

¹²² "Discipline," in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹²³ Durkheim, *Moral Education; a Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*, 47.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 49.

¹²⁵ Catholic Church. Congregatio pro Clericis, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 80.

¹²⁶ Lewis Joseph Sherrill, *The Gift of Power* (New York: McMillan, 1957), 2-9.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

the drama of interacting selves”¹²⁸ comes to understand, though the guidance of the Lord, that “determination [for the reign of God] is from within the self.”¹²⁹ However, self-determination should not be confused with self-creation; nor is it blind conformity to domination. A holistic understanding of self-determination is a response of the *whole person*, what religious educator Thomas Groome describes as “the body-soul union alive in God’s spirit,”¹³⁰ to the call of Jesus Christ to “come, follow me.”¹³¹

Self-transcendence, the fourth of Sherrill’s marks, arises “out of something *within* him [*sic*], it is a forthgoing of something *from* him [*sic*], it can make an impact on others, it can penetrate into other selves.”¹³² Catechesis for the reign of God requires an understanding of other-ness, be it neighbor, the natural world, or God. Persons of faith who have a self-transcending perspective make Jesus’ promise, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,”¹³³ a lived reality.

Kyriocentric catechesis that maintains and upholds the self-hood of the learner, begins from what Groome, terms “*humanitas* anthropology.”¹³⁴ As a foundation for pedagogy, *humanitas* anthropology not only affirms the person of the learner; it anticipates the encounter with a full self, replete with creative, critical abilities, in the educational process. Education for the reign of God, however, must also maintain and

¹²⁸ Ibid, 8.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 5.

¹³⁰ Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, 78.

¹³¹ Mk. 10:21, Mt. 19:21, Lk. 18:22.

¹³² Sherrill, *The Gift of Power*, 11.

¹³³ Mt. 18:20.

¹³⁴ Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, 75-98, esp 94.

uphold the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ, the mediator of God in the Holy Spirit. As the *General Directory for Catechesis* notes, “[t]he presentation of the innermost being of God, revealed by Jesus, the mystery of being one in essence and three in Person, has vital implications for the lives of human beings.”¹³⁵ Kyriocentric pedagogy, by holding up the self-hood of Jesus Christ, invites learners to a relationship that, as all relationships do, shapes, and guides the process of continually becoming persons themselves.

Traditional modes of catechesis were knowledge-driven whereby the learner was a recipient of “the handing on of the faith”¹³⁶ Employing a methodology that emphasized repetition, memorization, and obedience,¹³⁷ the recognition of the personhood of the learner became overtaken by the objectification as a *tabula rasa*. The resultant passivity expected of the learner and accepted by the educator created a chasm between life and faith. Life was the arena of engagement and critical thinking whereas faith was the arena of submissive, uncritical, reception . Rather than empowering persons for lives of active participation in the reign of God, these modes of catechesis became distorted symbols of the place of power and authority in faith, the church, and the reign of God.

One implication noted by the *General Directory for Catechesis* that arises from the recognition of the self-hood of the triune God, is “that man [*sic*] should not submit his

¹³⁵ Catholic Church. Congregatio pro Clericis, *General Directory for Catechesis*, §100.

¹³⁶ What Paulo Freire terms “banking education.” “This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store.” Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 72.

¹³⁷ While the early Irish also utilized these methods, they also included (as demonstrated in the survey section of this work) a strong sense of relationality, familiarity, and practicality which did not have the same bifurcation of life and faith that I point to here.

personal freedom in an absolute manner to any earthly power.”¹³⁸ Civil Rights leader, and Baptist minister, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., eloquently defined power:

Power, properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, or economic changes. In this sense power is not only desirable but necessary in order to implement the demands of love and justice. One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and power are usually contrasted as polar opposites. Love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love. ... What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demand of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.¹³⁹

Here, King crystallizes the aims of forming persons in faith through a kyriocentric approach: the summons to relationship with Jesus Christ, the king who, through active love, directs the lives of persons of faith for full participation in the reign of God.

Pedagogy of Covenantal Relationship

Educating for the reign of God by calling attention to the summons of the Lord, Jesus Christ, to relationship with the Divine Persons, provides the foundation for the covenantal engagement between God, humanity, and creation. As noted above, Harris proclaims “one Christian is no Christian.”¹⁴⁰ Before moving onto the role of the gathered community of Christians for religious education, an examination of the second component of the triad, covenant, the bond that transforms a collective of believers into a community, is necessary.

¹³⁸ Catholic Church. Congregatio pro Clericis, *General Directory for Catechesis*, § 100.

¹³⁹ Martin Luther King, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, Reprint 1989 ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 37.

¹⁴⁰ Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, 77.

Catechesis for covenant must begin by dispelling the notion “that we exist tangentially, each one of us occupies space, but we do not interact in any significant way.”¹⁴¹ Drawing on the work of Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, Sharon Todd of the Stockholm Institute of Education, calls for a move from tangentiality (being-aside), to being with, to the ultimate goal of “responsible togetherness” (being –for).¹⁴² Todd notes that one moves from being-aside to being-with through an *encounter* with another person. While this makes a chink in the armor of tangentiality, because to encounter an other connotes an acquaintance with their self-hood, it “is constrained by the parameters of time and place whereby people may have interesting interactions but are not transformed in any way by them.”¹⁴³ Therefore, further movement is crucial for covenantal relationship.

The final advance, to being-for, according to Bauman is, “a leap from isolation to unity, yet not towards a fusion that mystics dream of, shedding the burden of identity.”¹⁴⁴ It is, in the words of Todd, “a togetherness born of immediacy of interaction, a communicative gesture that does not have as its end anything except its own communicativeness, its own *response* [italics mine].”¹⁴⁵ If educating for the kingdom is calling attention to the summons of God in Jesus Christ, educating for covenant directs

¹⁴¹ Sharon Todd, "Teaching with Ignorance: Questions of Social Justice, Empathy, and Responsible Community," *Interchange* 35, no. 3 (2004): 344.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Cambridge Blackwell, 1995), 51.

¹⁴⁵ Todd, "Teaching with Ignorance: Questions of Social Justice, Empathy, and Responsible Community," 345.

learners in the discipline of response. In this way, Todd's "responsible togetherness" is, in the Christian understanding, covenantal relationship.

Religious educator Gabriel Moran calls for a "better grammar of responsibility"¹⁴⁶ because "responsibility is a quite complex philosophical term with a puzzling history ... that can function as a bridge between what is and what ought to be."¹⁴⁷ He goes to great lengths to illustrate the history of understandings of responsibility, from the original meaning of "response to a call," to the understanding from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century concept that equates "responsibility" with "fault." His present work seeks to recover responsibility as "the responsible person is someone who listens, recognizes the word as a personal address, and is impelled to answer."¹⁴⁸ Paraphrasing God's admonition to Cain, "I did not ask you to be his keeper, but to be his brother. Brothers are neither for keeping nor for killing,"¹⁴⁹ Moran urges a renewed understanding of responsibility as the ability to respond, response-ability, which moves the focus from the self to the other who is a subject in exchange not the possessed object (for either praise or blame).

I demonstrated above that the covenant of God with humanity was primarily ethical and secondarily, ontological. Religious education for covenant shifts from an ego-centric, personal (private) relationship with Jesus Christ (*my* Lord and Savior) to an other-centric relationship with God in Jesus Christ. This move must answer the question,

¹⁴⁶ Gabriel Moran, *A Grammar of Responsibility* (New York: Crossroad 1996), 129.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 7, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 37.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 75.

“to what and whom am I responsible?” as Moran does, “everything and everyone. ... Instead of urging people to accept their responsibilities, we [religious educators] should do better to develop their capacity for response.”¹⁵⁰

God’s covenant with creation is one of blessing, protection, love, and *freedom for* the fullness of life. Moran describes the liberating connection between freedom and responsibility, “If freedom depends on being responsible to, a different image emerges.” The place to listen is from the center rather than on top. Instead of a bulwark or dictator, freedom requires and emptiness, a space for listening.”¹⁵¹ Building upon formation for the reign of God, religious education for covenant awakens within the learner the intrinsic interconnectedness, between themselves, God, and neighbor that directs persons towards freedom and human flourishing. As Lewis Sherrill writes,

In the doctrine of the covenant, both God’s freedom and man’s freedom, both God’s responsibility to man and man’s responsibility to God are vividly set forth... Strictly speaking then, this education is not God centered nor is it [human]-centered. It is bi-polar , that is, it is concerned with the meeting between God and the human creature, and with the tension which rises with the encounter, calling for human response to God and for divine response to men[*sic*].¹⁵²

Forming persons of faith in covenantal relationship requires that educators "encourage learners to reflect critically and contemplatively."¹⁵³ Contemplation is the “practice of taking deliberate moments when we pay attention to the gift that is there, allowing

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 71, 82.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 99.

¹⁵² Sherrill, *The Gift of Power*, 89-90.

¹⁵³ Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, 142.

ourselves to receive it and to be absorbed by it to the depths of our soul.”¹⁵⁴ It can open a space for listening to the summons of God; before a response can happen, the summons must be heard.

Certainly, the summons of God is possible in the quiet of one’s heart, however, more often than not, the summons is more recognizable in the other before us. Catechesis for covenant therefore must also recognize that, “where the pedagogical insistence lies is in terms of how the other calls me into question and to learn from her [*sic*] in order to respond responsibly.”¹⁵⁵ In this attention to the other, the relationality between persons, covenantal relationship becomes evident because the essence of covenant is the going forth from the self as God did in creation, as Jesus did on the cross, and as persons of faith are called to do daily.

Education for the Body of Christ

The church-community is an ongoing revelation of God that, through the mystery of a common past and shared hope for the future, is an inseparable but unconfused union of its members. What is its role in the catechetical triad proposed in this work? How can religious educators enable people to lay claim to a communal, ecclesial identity without suppressing personal self-hood?

The Christian Story/Vision offers numerous examples of both personal and communal responses to the covenantal call of God. The patriarchs of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as Ruth, Naomi, Job, and the prophets among others, responded

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 152.

¹⁵⁵ Todd, "Teaching with Ignorance: Questions of Social Justice, Empathy, and Responsible Community," 349.

personally to the summons of faith. Personal experiences with Jesus of Nazareth moved many to lives of discipleship with the hope of salvation, including Mary of Magdala, Peter, the beloved disciple, and the Samaritan woman. As a result of the encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, transformed his life and his faith. These accounts may lead some to the mistaken notion that Christian faith is solely a matter of an individual relationship with God in Christ.

Fiorenza, notes “To embrace the Gospel means to enter community; the one cannot be obtained without the other.”¹⁵⁶ The Judeo-Christian tradition also attests to communal salvific hope. God liberated the entire House of Israel from the Egyptians, not only Moses and Aaron. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah proclaim a day when *all* of the People of God would return to the covenant and usher in the reign of God:

“Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation”¹⁵⁷

“Surely, in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel.”¹⁵⁸

Of course, the valley of dry bones in *Ezekiel* represents the restoration of the community of Israel.¹⁵⁹ The *Gospel of John* declares that God sent God’s Son into the world so that “the world may be saved.”¹⁶⁰ When Jesus *taught* the people to pray, he instructed them to call God “Our Father” (Πατερ ἡμῶν literally “Father of us”). Likewise, the *Hail Mary* prays “for us sinners,” and *Come Holy Spirit* prays “for the hearts of the faithful.” The

¹⁵⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-Logy of Liberation*, 198.

¹⁵⁷ Is. 25:9.

¹⁵⁸ Jer 3:23.

¹⁵⁹ Ez. 1-14.

¹⁶⁰ Jn 3:17, 12:47.

Eucharistic Prayers of the Catholic Church approach God in the first person plural, “we offer this sacrifice.” *Gaudium et spes* states that the purpose of the Church in the world is that “the kingdom of God may come and salvation of the human race may be accomplished.”¹⁶¹ These few examples acknowledge that the people of God, the Body of Christ, is in a covenantal relationship with God that invites participation by both persons and the community of faith.

Royce claimed it was the “mutual mystery” of a shared past and common future that united the community. United Methodist minister and religious educator Charles R. Foster suggests that the relationship to past events forms an archetype¹⁶² that guides the common hope for the future. Two key components of religious education that beckon persons into the mutual mystery are the ministries of *kerygma* (proclamation of the Christian Story/Vision) and *didache* (teaching). Harris highlights the connection between the two, “Teaching is not only an initiation into the church’s life and handing on the tradition; it is not only the application and explication of scriptures. Teaching is also the act of reinterpreting, questioning, analyzing, and even at times rejecting and resisting.”¹⁶³ Together, *kerygma* and *didache* makes accessible the normative events from which emerges the archetype of what it means to be a member of the Body of Christ.

Further, these two ministries are the heart of the hermeneutic actions of the church-community that reclaim and reinterpret not only the narrative of Christianity, but

¹⁶¹ Catholic Church, “Gaudium Et Spes,” in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents : Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello 1996), § 45.

¹⁶² Charles R. Foster, “The Faith Community as a Guiding Image for Christian Education,” in *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education*, ed. Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 54.

¹⁶³ Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, 116.

also its symbols and praxis so that the archetype conveys “a profoundly meaningful message for the human person.”¹⁶⁴ Just as the words, parables, and arguments of Jesus are inseparable from his life, his being,¹⁶⁵ the profundity of his message lies in its resonance to the life and being of believers. The church-community, serving as the interpreter, is not simply a translator; it transforms the significance of the Christian Story/Vision so that it resonates with the lives of persons of faith. Transformation of this sort can only occur in a relationship situated within a community of faith where the archetype of social relations and the processes by which the members relate to and act out of that archetype, forms personal and communal identity.¹⁶⁶

Despite the mutuality between the church-community and persons of faith in hermeneutic activities, many catechetical approaches remain unidirectional. They emphasize individual faith formation by encouraging learners to draw upon personal, often private, experiences with the expectation that a private, personal meaning can be exacted from the tradition of faith. In this scheme, Christian faith becomes confined to the vertical axis; it is solely a relationship between God and the person. While this methodology seeks to uphold the dignity of the individual before God, it countermands the communality of Christianity, i.e. “no one is a Christian in isolation.”¹⁶⁷ The result is

¹⁶⁴ Catholic Church, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), § 85.

¹⁶⁵ John Paul II, *Catechesis Tradendae*, English ed. (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1979), § 9.

¹⁶⁶ Berard L. Marthaler, "Socialization as a Model for Catechetics," in *Foundations of Religious Education*, ed. Padraig O'Hare (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 70-73.

¹⁶⁷ Iris V. Cully, *The Dynamics of Christian Education* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 36. Of course this sentiment is echoed in Maria Harris as well. see fn 133.

an ecclesial *anomie* that fragments the body of Christ into a collective of individual believers.

In order to “fashion a people” (as Harris names catechesis for community), it is essential to have a pedagogy of “communal grace.” Groome defines this as the “existential disposition for right and loving relationship” that “enables us to transcend self-narcissism and disposes us to love our God by loving others as we love ourselves.”¹⁶⁸ To educate persons in faith so that they become aware of and participate in communal grace, “catechesis must never mean a ‘reduction’ to a common minimum.”¹⁶⁹ It cannot be solely a memorization of doctrine or the facts of salvation history, nor can personal, private meaning-making become the end. A holistic catechetical approach for community must also include the intentional and explicit modeling of lived faith by the church-community as well as common meaning making inclusive of the lives of persons of faith. With this in mind, there then exists a pedagogy of the cross, incorporating both the vertical and the horizontal axes to fashion Christians in an experiential, reflective, interaction that manifests the covenantal relationship with God in Christ and neighbor. The church-community is not only the source of catechesis, it is also the learner.

Conclusion

Shannon Schrein’s imagery of “quilting and braiding” for her work on the christologies of Sallie McFague and Elizabeth Johnson¹⁷⁰ offers a powerful image for this

¹⁶⁸ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 430.

¹⁶⁹ John Paul II, *Catechesis Tradendae*, § 33.

¹⁷⁰ Shannon Schrein, *Quilting and Braiding: The Feminist Christologies of Sallie Mcfague and Elizabeth A. Johnson in Conversation* (Collegeville Liturgical Press, 1998).

chapter— to integrate wisdom from early Christian Ireland with theological insights of the post-Vatican II Catholic Church, with the voices of religious educators from a variety of backgrounds. “Piecing together” sounds too fragmentary. “Dialogue” usually connotes only two partners. “Integration” implies a melding together which can lose particularity. To draw this to a close, I borrow “quilting and braiding” from Schrein to express the multiplicity of layers and textures that comprise abiding faith.

The traditional triad of creed, code, and cult lacks dynamism for persons of faith and the church as the community in which they gather. Christian belief mandates vitality, energy, and a transcendent movement of people in relationship with one another and with God in Christ. Drawing upon the early Irish, I propose a new triad, a “pattern” *per se* that promotes relationality, Christ the king, covenant, and community. The newness however does not negate the traditional; rather it serves as the foundation from which creed, code, and cult are relevant but not absolute. Further, because the Irish triad begins with and returns to the daily experiences of persons, catechesis of Christ the king, covenant and community engenders an Abiding Christianity that incorporates and permeates both faith and life.

Of course, some “formatting” of the sovereignty of Christ, covenantal relationship and the faith community was the first step. Each of these three images, over time, accumulated tangential concepts that no longer coalesce with contemporary culture or Christianity. Therefore, I rehabilitated the attendant concerns such as power, domination, obedience, and exclusivity; replacing them with historically and etymologically correct ideas of governance, blessing, justice, and universality.

Each step here was bifocal with one eye towards the early Irish and another towards the present, yet in the end, the “design” became clearer. Learning from the past does not mean to recreate it. Preservation of ideas does not demand their perpetual enshrinement *in toto*. True wisdom is eternal, guiding persons forward in the present, not drawing them back to a past that they may not remember. This is the beauty of Christian faith; the *evangelion* means as much today as it did to Mary, Peter, Andrew, Martha, Lazarus, and the others. Only when the force of its message has direct bearing on both the present circumstance and the future held in common by the church-community, can it become an integrated abiding faith.

The church-community today is in a world of compartmentalization, sound-bytes, and technology that substitutes communication for relationship. It has lost the thread that ties life together, that helps persons to be whole *and* holy. Religious education for abiding faith “weaves” together faith and life, belief in God and active love of neighbor, personal and communal identities. It grounds all experiences in a covenantal relationship that understands daily life abiding in God under the guidance and direction of a sovereign Lord.

The Early Irish Church was not utopian; but their unique circumstance in relation to the rest of western civilization provided the opportunity for a particular interpretation of Christianity to develop. The wisdom of Patrick, Brigit, Columba, Íta, real people who navigated the choppy waters of epochal change, offers hope for persons of faith in today’s world, bursting with diversity and transformation of the familiar at every turn. The example of the Irish saints, who “braided” indigenous culture with Roman

Christianity in their knot work of Irish faith in Jesus Christ has a voice for today's church that is paradigmatically European in praxis but increasingly non-European in members.

Religious education for abiding faith offers the church-community and its members a vision for renewed vitality; relevance for faith and for life.

CHAPTER 5 RECONSTITUTING HABITS OF THINKING—WISDOM FROM THE EARLY IRISH EXPERIENCE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TODAY

Introduction

Despite the veil of time and romanticized misperceptions, the early Irish Church proves to be a rich source of wisdom for contemporary religious education. Its faith was orthodox, in communion with Rome, yet at the same time, it bore discernible particularities that make it clearly identifiable as Irish. Pedagogically, the early Irish offer ways of re-conceptualizing religious education that, while rooted in the past, can revitalize the Church today. In this chapter, I propose ways in which this recovered early Irish wisdom—educating for abiding faith— can be incorporated into modern religious education.

For centuries, the life of the Church has become increasingly privatized and segregated from daily life. Faith, it would seem, has been divorced from the workplace, schools, or even discussions between friends. The effect is devastating upon the lives of persons of faith *and* the Church. Many no longer view the voice of the Church as a primary source of morality and justice; seeing it as ancillary to any pertinent discussions of local and global affairs. In order to counteract this re-placement of faith as irrelevant to daily life, religious education must, as educator Dwayne Huebner writes begin by, “reconstituting habits of thinking.”¹

While the early Irish Christians lived in a much more homogenous culture than persons of faith today, reconstituting habits of thinking so that the Church “recaptures its

¹ Dwayne E. Huebner, "Religious Education: Practicing the Presence of God (1987)," in *The Lure of the Transcendent*, ed. William Pinar, *Studies in Curriculum Theory* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 392.

prophetic zeal”² does not necessarily mean that it will be the lone voice in the public square.³ Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2008 speech to the participants in the

Catholic-Muslim Forum, recognized the strength of multiple faiths working together,

God calls us to work together on behalf of the victims of disease, hunger, poverty, injustice, and violence. [...] We should thus work together in promoting genuine respect for the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights, even though our anthropological visions and our theologies justify this in different ways.⁴

By fostering formation for abiding faith, not only do faith and life become one, but also faith becomes liberated from the socially imposed confines of the private sphere to regain its relevance for both daily life and the public discourse.

Towards this end, in this chapter I highlight two manners in which the shared Christian praxis approach of Thomas Groome lends itself for forming people of abiding faith: 1) in a formal religious education setting, and 2) through the liturgy.⁵ The wisdom of the early Irish Church advises that neither of these two is sufficient in the absence of the other. Formal religious education provides the framework for understanding the liturgy while the liturgical celebration enhances the critical reflection of faith that occurs in the formal setting. Together, formal religious education and liturgical participation,

²King, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 96.

³ I am not advocating for a return to a Christian Empire, only that the Church have a voice among other voices.

⁴ Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict Xvi to Participants in the Seminar Organized by the Catholic-Muslim Forum " (Vatican City: Catholic Church, 2008).

⁵ I proposed in the previous chapter that that educating for abiding faith with a focus on the recovered Irish triad (Christ the king, covenant, and community), should be the *precursor* to the traditional foci of religious education (creed, code, and cult). The suggestion here that liturgy can be formational does not contradict my proposal to reorder the foci of religious education. Participation in the liturgy offers persons of faith the opportunity to learn a sense of covenantal relationship with God and neighbor. However, liturgy is not a sufficient initiatory approach to faith formation. It must be preceded by catechesis to enable learners to recognize the symbols and statements in the liturgy that interweave faith, life, and liturgy.

allow persons of faith to reconstitute habits of thinking so that they “practice the presence of God,”⁶ that is abiding faith.

Forming Persons of Abiding Faith Through A Shared Christian Praxis Approach

The shared Christian praxis approach of Thomas Groome allows for incorporation of key educational insights gained from the above study of the evangelization of early Ireland. First, shared Christian praxis calls for educating persons for lives of faith. A dichotomy between faith and life would have been foreign to the early Irish. They formed people for one, sphere of living inclusive of faith and life, what I term “abiding faith.” Second, shared Christian praxis begins with the experience of the learners then introduces the Christian Story/Vision in a manner that is both accessible and relevant for living in faith. The early Irish contextualized the Christian Story/Vision so that it resonated with the life experiences of the learners, thereby making the content of faith understandable and pertinent for their lives. Together, the wisdom of the early Irish and shared Christian praxis complement one another and offer a beneficial framework for educating for abiding faith.

The shared Christian praxis approach is a process of “dialectical hermeneutics”⁷ toward and between life and Christian faith by which learners not only come to know information about faith, but are transformed by it. As Groome explains,

First, shared Christian praxis invites people to hermeneutics that are critical in a dialectical sense of their own and of their society’s praxis. As participants attend to present praxis and reflect on it with critical reason, analytical memory, and creative imagination, they may affirm

⁶ Huebner, “Religious Education: Practicing the Presence of God (1987),” 388.

⁷ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 145.

aspects of it, question or reject aspects, and discover ways in which their interpretations invite then beyond present praxis.⁸

Through the shared Christian praxis approach, learners are able to call into question the divide between faith and life, resulting in a change in what Jack Mezirow terms their “meaning schemes (specific beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions).”⁹ As a transformative pedagogy, shared Christian praxis forms persons in faith so that, as was the case with the early Irish, discipleship and life are as one; life and Christian faith merge into lived faith.

The shared Christian praxis approach is a cohesive schema of five movements¹⁰ in which learners bring both their own present praxis and the Christian Story/Vision into a critical conversation aimed at integrating these two sources into Christian discipleship. To engage in the movements is to embark upon a reflection of what might be referred to as an “applied theological anthropology.” The movements of shared Christian praxis are:

- The Focusing Activity “establishes a focus for the curriculum by turning people to their own ‘being’ in place and time [and] to their present praxis.”¹¹
- Movement 1 asks the learners to “name or express the present praxis concerning the generative theme.”¹²
- Movement 2 encourages learners to critically reflect upon the present praxis therefore uncovering “assumptions, prejudices, and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 1st ed., *The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 167.

¹⁰ Groome encourages flexibility in the movements. He writes, “The sequence I have outlines from focusing activity to movement 5 reflects the cumulative dynamic of a conative pedagogy. In existential events, however, this dynamic should be an orchestrative process rather than an inflexible sequence.” Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 279.

¹¹ Ibid, 146.

¹² Ibid.

ideologies; its socio-historical and biographical sources and intended or likely outcomes.”¹³

- Movement 3 is what Groome terms “Making accessible the Christian lends ready access to the wisdom of the Christian Story/Vision as it pertains to the generative theme of the event and echoes the conversation of movements 1 and 2.”¹⁴
- Movement 4 calls the learners to “place their critical understanding of present praxis around a generative theme or symbol in dialectical hermeneutics with [the] Christian Story/Vision.”¹⁵
- Movement 5 is the moment for decisive for action in which learners, because of the integration of experience and the metanarrative of Christianity, imagine ways of living (cognitive, affective or behavioral) in abiding faith.

Shared praxis, like the pedagogy of the early Irish, demonstrates the interrelatedness of faith and life. It forms people *of* faith. Here the preposition is key. Just as a person of color cannot divorce their ethnicity from their being, persons of faith must realize the ontological component of faith. Abiding faith does not simply inform life, it becomes constitutive of the sense of personhood and cannot be rendered irrelevant to the actions and decisions of daily living.

Groome’s shared Christian praxis dovetails naturally with educating for abiding faith. The evidence from the early Irish demonstrates that the evangelists who converted the Irish, like Groome, placed a priority on experience. Indeed, as I demonstrated in chapter 2, the early Irish intentionally sought out the points of resonance between native Irish culture and Christian faith and built upon them in religious education. With shared Christian praxis as the pedagogical approach and the Irish triad of Christ the King,

¹³ Ibid, 147.

¹⁴ Groome, Thomas H. *Personal Note*. January 2009.

¹⁵ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 147.

covenant, and community as the overarching focus for forming persons of faith, religious education can eliminate the divide between faith and life and inculcate a sense that all of life is practicing the presence of God in abiding faith.

Shared Christian Praxis in the Formal Educational Setting

In a formal educational setting, the religious educator can form people in abiding faith, be it in initial or lifelong catechesis, through shared Christian praxis. Rather than didactically instructing learners on the theological components of abiding faith, (Christ the King, covenant, and community), shared Christian praxis allows educators to elucidate concepts by turning to the preconceptions and experiences of the learners. In this way learners bring their lives to faith and faith to their lives.

To focus on abiding faith, the generative activity could call to mind a universally accessible concept that underscores the Irish triad such as relationships. In the early Irish Church, (and in early Irish society), relationships were intrinsic to life and faith. While the pre-Christian understanding of one's social location (Fig. 1) adapted taxonomically to the Christianization of Irish society the undergirding principles of honor, respect, and reciprocal responsibility remained constant. To start with the concept of relationships as the generative theme provides an experiential connection between life and faith. As Huebner notes,

The language of religious education must be a way of speaking of our relationship as a given, one of God's gifts. It must be a way of speaking that enables us to see our individualism and our separation from each other as a breakdown in our acknowledgement of God's grace, of the love that binds us to each other in and through God.¹⁶

¹⁶ Huebner, "Religious Education: Practicing the Presence of God (1987)," 391.

The educator can guide the learners' reflection from their relationships with others to their relationship with God. However, care should be taken not to separate the two; rather the educator should interweave them to demonstrate that relationship with God and with one another are intrinsically linked in what Groome refers to a "communal grace." He explains that it is "an existential disposition for right and loving relationship" that "enables us to transcend self-narcissism and disposes us to love our God by loving others as we love ourselves."¹⁷

Reflecting the early Irish Christian wisdom, in the first movement, learners should express their present understanding of the constitutive elements of relationships including 1) the pledge of trust and promise (covenant), 2) the impact and guidance that relationships have upon daily activities (Christ the king) and, 3) the aspects of relationship that join people together (community). Again, it is not necessary *at this point* to explicitly link the reflections to the theological premises; in fact, doing so may unduly influence the learner's reflections. The focus of movement 1 is to call forth the learners' current perspectives, as varied and deeply personal or socially located as they may be.

In the second movement, probing questions facilitate critical reflection and uncover biases and suppositions that undergird the present perspective. By asking, "Why do you consider this element necessary for relationship?" the educator can help learners peel away superficial and (often) extraneous elements. This allows them to ascertain their core understandings of relationships. In uncovering preconceived notions as well as participants best hopes for healthy relationships, the educator establishes a baseline, what

¹⁷ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 430.

Groome terms “present praxis” upon which the next movement can introduce an experiential and relevant abiding faith.

Groome rightly refers to movement 3 as an exercise in “making accessible” the Christian Story/Vision. While as a person of faith, the educator may claim the Story/Vision as integral to their own identity, because this is a *shared Christian praxis* approach, the educator must always present the Story/Vision in a manner that allows each learner to engage it on their own terms. It cannot be static, complete, and thereby *something*, which the learner’s only options are to accept or reject. On the contrary, the Christian Story/Vision is a dynamic tradition of spiritual wisdom that calls persons to active hermeneutic activity. Presented this way, learners can identify with its meaning for them and, because of their own critical reflection, their lives become a part of the narrative.

As chapter 4 notes, there are a myriad of biblical and ecclesial texts from which the educator can choose to invite learners to abiding faith. I suggest the Johannine understanding of abiding,¹⁸

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

What is important for movement 3 is that the educator provides a broad spectrum of content so that the learners see that the Story/Vision is indeed accessible to them and that they can abide in it, making it their own. When educators present the Christian Story/Vision as a narrow, rigid, *fait accompli* they do violence both to the tradition and to

¹⁸ most explicitly expressed in Jn 15: 9-10

the learners. The story always lends itself to an open-ended narrative, however the sense of vision that arises from the story helps to ensure an open horizon for abiding faith. For some, the biblical accounts may be the point of entry however, for others it may be the magisterial content of Church teaching. Still, for others, it might be film or other media that tell the lives of persons of faith (both contemporary and ancient).

Movement 4 is the time for critical interpretation and appropriation of the Christian Story/Vision. Here the learners first engage in an activity similar to movement 2, only this time with the faith tradition as the focus. In my classroom, I begin movement 4 by asking the learners to write down the content of movement 3 that surprised them, angered them, soothed them, or in any other way drew their response. This becomes the foundation for discussion. Through conversation with others about the response to the Story/Vision, learners begin to come to points of resonance with their own experiences. One can imagine the early Irish Christians in this stage of faith formation asking, “How does the faith tradition challenge present praxis?” and, “In what ways does it confirm it?” These and other questions allow learners the opportunity for the integration of faith and life into abiding faith.

Groome notes that a linear approach to the movements may not always be appropriate.¹⁹ The educator may suggest that learners revisit their core understandings of movement 2, followed by the introduction of new content in movement 3. This of course would bring new insights for critical reflection to movement 4. Through the activities of movements two to four, learners engage in what Groome terms a “Lonerganian sense of

¹⁹ See n10, above.

judgment,”²⁰ that guides learners as they move toward the decision to become persons of abiding faith.

Yet, appropriation of faith, if integrated holistically with personal identity, calls for expression. For abiding faith, this expression occurs in covenantal relationship with Christ the king, as well as with others in the community of faith, the Church. Avery Dulles proposed *Community of Disciples* as a primary model of Church,²¹ one that, as Groome writes, “points to the Christian community as people called by God to learn and teach together through “shared” praxis, dialogue, and discernment how to live the way of Jesus.”²² Movement 5 of shared Christian praxis is the moment for decision, for living lives of discipleship—the way of Jesus in abiding faith.

For persons of abiding faith, discipleship is the only manner of living; it *is* life. The early Irish Christians did not compartmentalize daily life and faith. They did not conceptualize their lives as occasionally accentuated by their faith in Jesus Christ, the true *ard rí*. Religious education for abiding faith via the shared Christian praxis approach brings learners to the realization that they will not perform “acts of faith” but will transform their whole lives into ones of discipleship—an ontological realization of faith in their very identity. In this way they, like the early Irish,²³ will live with:

²⁰ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 251-252.

²¹ Avery Robert Dulles, "Community of Disciples as a Model of Church," *Philosophy and Theology* 1, no. 2 (1986). This model later evolved into the Church of Disciples in the revised edition of his seminal work, *Models of the Church*. Avery Robert Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1987).

²² Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 444.

²³ The full text of the *Lorica Patricii* is in Appendix 1.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
 Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
 Christ on my right, Christ on my left.

The Educative Aspects of Liturgy for Formation of Abiding Faith

Liturgy is a time to celebrate intentionally and explicitly the guiding presence of God in Christ. At the same time, it celebrates the covenantal relationship with God and empowers persons for right and loving relationships in the world. That the liturgical experience is a communal and not an act of private personal piety underscores the collective identity of the members of the faith community. Liturgy then, is effective for inculcating abiding faith.

Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, notes the connection between liturgy and catechesis, “Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings.”²⁴ Unfortunately, however, catechists frequently understand the connection as a mandate solely to prepare persons “for” liturgy.

The Second Vatican Council called for “fully conscious and active participation” in the liturgy.²⁵ Therefore, it seems appropriate that catechists are attentive to the preparation of the faithful for full participation. After all, liturgy is “the work of the people”²⁶ and, as with any work, preparation must take place. As Robert Starratt

²⁴ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, English ed. (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1979), 23.

²⁵ Catholic Church, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium,” in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello, 1996), § II.14.

²⁶ The term liturgy is a cognate of λαος (people) and εργον (work).

observes, “If the assembly does not understand the words it utters or recites it cannot enter into the making of the Eucharist.”²⁷ However, liturgical catechesis must understand that its scope is not “merely [...] explaining the meaning of the ceremonies, but also by forming the minds of the faithful for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for prayer with confidence, for a community spirit.”²⁸ Further, the adequately prepared assembly will be able to bring their lives to God and God to their lives, *especially* in the liturgy.

In full acknowledgement of the need to catechize for liturgy, in this section, I demonstrate that, not only is liturgy itself educative, it is effective for inculcating abiding faith. Of course, any discussion of liturgy and catechesis must note that the purpose of liturgy is not a didactic act. It is educational, but as Groome notes,

Christian liturgy is an intensified symbolic mediation of covenant and encounter between God and a Christian community in the Risen Christ; as such it is to symbolically express “in Spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:23) God’s life in love to its community of participants and their life in faith to God, to empower people for God’s reign in the world.²⁹

Accordingly, Brett Webb-Mitchell’s observes that liturgical practices are acts of *φρονεσις* (*phronesis*), “a virtue known inductively rather than deductively, taught *from* and *in* the experience rather than outside the experience, to be applied later to an experience.”³⁰

²⁷ Robert J. Starratt, “Liturgy as Curriculum: The Dynamics of Liturgical Education,” *Catholic Education* 4, no. 1 (2000): 58.

²⁸ Catholic Church. Congregatio pro Clericis., *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 25.

²⁹ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 341.

³⁰ Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures: Learning to Be Members of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 181.

If the catechetical dimension of liturgy is over-emphasized, if it is reduced to a means, a pedagogical tool, is, in the words of Aidan Kavanaugh, “to do it violence.”³¹ Further attesting to the vitality of the liturgical celebration Casiano Floristán cautions that, “just as any abuse of the liturgy can bring about a manipulation of the faith, dogmatic fossilization can cause a distortion of the liturgy.”³² In balance, Phillip Pfatteicher notes that while liturgical inculturation is vital to meaningful participation, if “[we] seek to make our worship say what we think it ought to say so that it will speak to modern people in a language that we think they will understand” we run the risk of losing the “voice of the Gospel.”³³

Kavanaugh proposes a middle ground, educating “through” liturgy. Here Mary Charles Bryce concurs. She writes, “One might say that the *lex credendi*, *lex orandi* were also *lex catechizandi* of the Church.”³⁴ To educate through liturgy is to be properly prepared to become participants, not an audience in the liturgical gathering. Further, it is to be aware of the catechetical qualities of the liturgy. Liturgical ministers must be sensitive to these concerns; retaining the integrity of the liturgical celebration while making it an accessible and meaning-making, life affirming, gathering for persons of abiding faith.

³¹ Aidan Kavanaugh, “Teaching through Liturgy,” *Notre Dame Journal of Education* 5, no. 1 (1974).

³² Casiano. Floristán, “The Liturgy: The Place for Education in the Faith,” in *The Transmission of the Faith to the Next Generation*, ed. Virgil Elizondo and Norbert Greinacher, *Concilium* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 55.

³³ Philip H. Pfatteicher, *The School of the Church: Worship and Christian Formation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 84.

³⁴ Mary C. Bryce, “The Inter-Relationship of Liturgy and Catechesis,” *American Benedictine Review* 28 (1977): 19.

Explicit and Implicit Liturgical “Curriculum”

The liturgical celebration has several elements that are explicitly and implicitly catechetical, yet allow it to remain true to its function and place in the life of the Church. The explicitly catechetical elements include the hymns, gathering rites, penitential rites, readings and psalmody, homily, and communion rites. Those that I place in the implicitly catechetical group, the “hidden curriculum” of liturgy, are the symbolic aspects such as the worship environment, the gathered community, and the language and gestures of the liturgy.

Symbols carry meaning and are vital because, as religious educator Lewis Sherrill writes “man’s [sic] encounter with God requires symbols.”³⁵ For symbols to be effective, they must “invite us to personally appropriate the world of meaning and ethic that they reflect.”³⁶ In the worship space, there are many symbols present which express that we are about to enter “a holy time in a privileged place”³⁷ The artwork, stained glass, seating arrangements, the gender, age and ethnicity of the liturgical ministers each make a theological and thus a catechetical statement. Throughout the liturgy, the assembly and the liturgical ministers perform a variety of gestures. These too are symbols as they provide what Fowler terms “kinesthetics of faith.”³⁸ The making of ritual gestures allows

³⁵ Sherrill, *The Gift of Power*, 122.

³⁶ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 358.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 351.

³⁸ James W. Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 181.

the assembly to understand that “the liturgy is corporeal not cerebral”³⁹ and inculcates the “habits of the body in the Christian life.”⁴⁰

Just as the gathered assembly is the “foremost liturgical symbol,” the act of gathering itself is catechetical. Coming together, Anderson notes that the assembly finds a “shared sense of meaning [...] [because the liturgy] offer ways by which to narrate who we are and where we belong, orient persons and communities in relation to one another, orchestrate passages through human existence, and integrate the human and cosmic, biological and social orders.”⁴¹ This meaning making does not occur coincidentally by coming together in close proximity with others, rather “the Christian assembly must form a minimal community.”⁴² Once a parish builds and nurtures a sense of community, the gathered assembly can understand the liturgy as “making explicit the good we have in common.”⁴³ The symbolic meaning expressed by the Christian community extends to counter the “privatization of spiritual realities” prevalent in society, and, therefore, it nourishes abiding faith.

A catechetical approach to liturgy that preserves its integrity and functions of the liturgy can draw the gathered assembly into the fully active, conscious participation called for by the Council. The implications that I draw are threefold. First, the full active participation of the community in the liturgy helps form people as members of the Body

³⁹ E. Byron Anderson, “Liturgical Catechesis: Congregational Practice as Formation,” *Religious Education* 92, no. Sum (1997): 357.

⁴⁰ Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures*, 93-94.

⁴¹ Anderson, “Liturgical Catechesis,” 356-358.

⁴² Floristán, “The Liturgy: The Place for Education in the Faith,” 59.

⁴³ Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures*, 130.

of Christ. Second, catechesis “through” liturgy is possible without “doing violence” to its integrity. Finally, empowerment by the liturgy is not for self-gratification, but for commitment to the “covenant pledge to work for the establishment of God’s reign.”⁴⁴

As with many things in life, a sense of integrity, function, and balance is a necessity for understanding the connection between liturgy and catechesis. Liturgy must be engaging and relevant but retain the “voice of the Gospel.” It must be understandable, yet not reduced to a drama under scrutiny. It must be both source and summit of the Christian life and, therefore, of abiding faith.

The Example of Roncalli Newman Parish

Roncalli Newman Parish in La Crosse, WI⁴⁵ is the Catholic presence on the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse campus. There are 1,000 students “on the rolls” of the parish as well as 475 families, whom the pastor, Fr. Mark Pierce, refers to as “stationary members.” The parish caps the number of families at this number to preserve its student centeredness. In fact, the parish maintains a waiting list of families eager to join the congregation officially. On any given Sunday, attendance at the parish’s three liturgies hovers around 1,000 people.⁴⁶

The liturgies of the Roncalli balance the need for relevance and integrity described in the forgoing section. They integrate faith and live seamlessly, thereby

⁴⁴ Bernard J. Cooke, *The Future of Eucharist: How a New Self-Awareness among Catholics Is Changing the Way They Believe and Worship* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 37.

⁴⁵ Permission granted by Pastor Fr. Mark Pierce for inclusion in this work. In the description that follows, I offer a composite of the liturgical practices rather than of one particular liturgical gathering. Roncalli is currently undergoing a major building renovation, therefore I exclude the building and environment from the following the discussion.

⁴⁶ These figures provided by the Director of Music, Mary Ellen Haupert, Ph.D.

enriching lives of faith. Through symbols and gestures that are at the same time doctrinally orthodox and locally enculturated,⁴⁷ these gatherings foster life-long catechesis for Christ the King, covenant, and community. Participation in the liturgies at Roncalli cultivates, and nourishes abiding faith in a manner that resonate with shared Christian praxis.

Groome notes, that “the undergirding commitments of shared Christian praxis [...] all seem appropriate to liturgy’s essential functions. Likewise the constitutive functions of liturgy are at least resonant with the dynamics of a shared Christian praxis event.”⁴⁸ In the following description, many points of resonance between shared Christian praxis and the Roncalli liturgical preparation and celebrations become evident.⁴⁹

Roncalli prepares the congregation for liturgy by printing the readings for the following week in the bulletin. In addition to simply listing the biblical verses, it also offers a synopsis and questions for people to reflect upon in anticipation of the next gathering for “the Lord’s Day,” (a phrase emphasized in both the bulletin and the

⁴⁷ See p 69 above for treatment of enculturation.

⁴⁸ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 362.

⁴⁹ I will not burden the text with indicators of the movements of shared Christian praxis; some instances described may be inclusive of more than one movement. What is evident in the descriptions of the liturgical practices described below are Groome’s principles of shared Christian praxis— bringing faith to life and life to faith through the process of making the Christian Story/Vision accessible and relevant for lives of discipleship. In this manner, these liturgical gatherings offer both the nourishment and impetus for abiding faith. Although the early Irish liturgical texts discussed in chapter 3, with their emphases on Christ the King, covenant, and community, provide the foundation for abiding faith, it is my contention that the liturgies at Roncalli foster abiding faith through the entire participatory experience. In an effort to provide smoother reading of the description, I will confine my comments on the Irish wisdom implicit in these liturgies to the end of this section.

liturgical celebration). For example, the bulletin for February 1, 2009 includes the following:

Readings for Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Feb 08)

Job 7:1-4, 67; 1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23; Mark 1:29-39

The healing wrought by God is at the heart of today's scriptures, a healing that reaches into the depths of human misery – whether physical as in the case of Peter's mother-in-law and others brought to Jesus, or mental as in the case of Job and his anguish... or those other mentioned in the gospels "afflicted by evil spirits." Suffering is an inescapable part of the human conditions (note that Mark tells us "the whole town was gathered at the door.") Healing and wholeness are integrally related to Jesus' proclamation of the Gospel. What anguish or suffering in your life needs to be brought to Jesus right now? How can the good news be preached to heal it?

With this insertion, Roncalli offers a generative theme that, at the outset, connects the upcoming celebration of the "Lord's Day" with the lives of the assembly. This faith to life and life to faith sentiment flavors the entire liturgical experience at Roncalli.

As the assembly gathers for liturgy, they are warmly welcomed by several people stationed by the doors of the sanctuary. Each person received a worship aid that again, like many parishes, details the hymns, readings, and responses. However, at Roncalli, this aid also offers the following:

Music for Today's Liturgies

In this Sunday's readings the call to repentance comes within the context of the proclamation of the Gospel and the call to discipleship. In the first reading, the inhabitants of Ninevah are warned to repent or be destroyed. Much to the surprise of Jonah, the WHOLE of the city dresses in sackcloth and proclaims a fast! Their whole-hearted readiness to repent was their salvation. The closing hymn (There's a Wideness in God's Mercy") was chosen with the final verse of the first reading in mind: "When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil ways, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out"(Jonah 3:10). You'll notice that both repentance and forgiveness are emulated by God. In today's Gospel,

Jesus first declares, “Repent and believe in the gospel” and then invites fishermen Simon and the sons of Zebedee to drop their nets and become his disciples. The gathering hymn (“The Summons”) and the music for the communion procession (“Take, O Take Me As I Am”), acknowledge both our sinfulness and the radical changes we often need to make. The music for the preparation of the gifts (“Set Your Hearts on the Higher Gifts”) was inspired by Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, which we read (in part) during the winter months of Ordinary Time. The letter is Paul’s way of nursing this fledgling community into a more mature way of expressing their Christianity. His challenges are steep, given the melting pot of tradition (a.k.a. “baggage”) in ancient Corinth, but his determined efforts to help them see the light is grace in action.

Here, the explicit message is that the music is indeed a component of the liturgical celebration rather than window dressing or a showcase of musical talent. The congregation enters the song with the knowledge that the words that they sing have meaning for themselves, for the assembly as a whole, and for their worship of God.

There are no ushers here; the congregation and liturgical ministers fill this role. In fact, in one instance, after noticing that there were several people still standing after the entrance procession, the presider took the family by the hand and personally guided them to available seats. This small gesture carried the strong message that the community welcomed them into the gathering and encouraged their participation.

This parish has one priest, Fr. Mark Pierce. At each of the three liturgies, it is his custom to begin the Introductory Rites with a warm welcome to the member and visitor alike. At each liturgy, Fr. Peirce begins this welcome with a broad, genuine smile and the proclamation that “It is good to come together on this, the Lord’s Day, the first day of our week! Let us begin our prayer together with the sign of the cross.” At the conclusion of the *Introductory Rites*, Fr. Pierce addresses the congregation again. Here he offers

guidance for the readings that follow. At times, he offers a reminder of the continuity with the previous week's readings to contextualize the message. At others, he advises the assembly to be alert for particular phrases or themes throughout the present readings. In any event, the bulletin, worship aid, and the instructions of the presider, consciously alert the assembly to the wisdom of the Scriptures.

Needless to say, the homilies at Roncalli aim (successfully) to “inform, form, and transform”⁵⁰ the gathered community. Fr. Pierce places the texts within the tradition of the Church, the scope of the Liturgical Year, and the context of the present liturgical celebration. He consistently lifts out the message of the texts and presents in such a way that the members of the assembly recognize the transcendent quality of the narratives. In this manner, they come to see relevance and implications for their own lives. Sometimes this occurs through exposition, while at others Fr. Pierce questions the texts and encourages the congregation to do the same reflectively. In this homiletic experience, the Christian Story/Vision breaks through from the pages and into the lives of the persons of faith.

As is the case in any church, there are often baptisms included in the “Lord’s Day” liturgies. At Roncalli, the baby, parents, and godparents come forward to the center of the sanctuary for the *Baptismal Rite*. While Fr. Pierce adapts some of the language of the rite for this admittedly young and contemporary assembly, it is not the words alone but a gesture that has the loudest “voice” in meaning-making for both the family of the baptized and the congregation. In the *Reception of the Child*, Fr. Pierce proclaims,

⁵⁰Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*.

“__N____, the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name, I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of his cross. I now trace the cross on your forehead, and invite your parents, and godparents, *and the community gathered here* to do the same.”

He traces the sign of the cross on the baby’s forehead, as do the parents and godparents.

Then, the godparents bring the baby around the *entire congregation*, where everyone gathered offers congratulations and traces the sign of the cross on the newly baptized baby’s forehead. This very simple gesture inculcates a strong communal identity and initiation into the community of faith.

During the *Eucharistic Rites*, like the *Baptismal Rite*, Fr. Pierce again makes minor adaptations to the language of the text; often inserting contextualizations that make the prayers accessible to the assembly. These alterations are not didactic; rather, they flow effortlessly and understandably. For example, Fr. Pierce acknowledges the offerings brought by the assembly during the Offertory and segues into the *Eucharistic Prayers* by commenting that, “we have brought the fruits of our labors to the altar of God and now we prepare to receive the gift of God, the Body and Blood of Christ.” During the *Institution Narrative*, he invites the congregation to bow with him. To introduce the *Our Father*, he says, “Let us acknowledge our poverty before God by coming with outstretched open hands to pray, Our Father, who art in heaven [...]” These minor adaptations engender a sense of covenantal relationship between God and the people as well as fostering the communal identity of the gathered assembly as the Body of Christ. The liturgy concludes with Fr. Pierce’s invitation to “Rise and let us complete our prayer,” after which he offers the *Benediction* and *Dismissal*.

Like the early Irish experience, the liturgical celebrations at Roncalli celebrate Christian faith through gestures, symbols, and texts that affirm the community gathered in covenantal relationship with God in Christ—the one that governs their lives. From the welcoming dialogue referring to “Lord’s Day,” to the communal bow at the elevation, to the approach to the *Lord’s Prayer*, the congregation at Roncalli recognize the royal office of Christ. Just as early Irish society revolved around the concept of honor,⁵¹ these kinesthetics of faith acknowledge the honor of one who is, alongside and above, divine and human, king and guide.

For the early Irish, the *fine* was the body to whom one owed loyalty and responsibility. Each *fine* was independent, but together they comprised the *túath*. Through the narratives of the *filid*, each *fine* gained a sense of shared history and communal identity. Likewise, the intentional connection of the weekly readings to the *Lectionary* sequence, church history and liturgical season, as well as their application to daily life, fosters a covenantal relationship between the individual worshippers, the community gathered for liturgy, and the Church in the world. By making explicit these associations, Fr. Pierce not only makes chinks in the barrier between life and faith, he cultivates the ownership of a collective shared past and hope for the future.⁵² Finally, while the sense of reciprocal responsibility and support among the worshippers is always present through the expectation of full participation in the liturgy, it peaks at those celebrations that include a baptism. To present the newly baptized to each and every

⁵¹ See chapter 1 above especially p 5ff and Fig. 1.

⁵² See chapter 3 above., esp 172ff.

member of the assembly, affirms the responsibility and covenantal relationship between the persons gathered as a community of faith.

From these examples, it becomes possible to claim that while the liturgy is not an educational tool, an approach such as that of Fr. Pierce and the community at Roncalli allows the liturgical celebration to become a formative experience that nourishes and expresses abiding faith.

Conclusion

The early Irish Christians evangelized and catechized for abiding faith. Their religious educational approach *began* with the lived experiences of the learners and commenced with the introduction of an Irish-enculturated Christian Story/Vision. The Irish evangelists intentionally and explicitly interwove the Christian narrative with Irish life. The relationships between *rí* and *túath* provided the kernels for accepting Christ the King and his community, the Church, in a covenantal embrace. Conversion to Christianity meant transformation of the understanding of life to one encompassed and lived out in abiding faith.

Thomas Groome states that a purpose of religious education (and therefore the shared Christian praxis approach) is “to promote lived Christian faith in the lives of participants.”⁵³ The movements of shared Christian praxis engage learners in a manner that echoes early Irish pedagogy with its experiential emphasis and invitation to integrate faith and life. In a formal educational environment, Groome’s approach draws learners into critical reflection upon their own experiences and biases from which they can

⁵³ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, 18.

formulate new ways of living in faith. Likewise in the liturgical celebration, such as those at Roncalli Newman, preparing the assembly for liturgy and engaging them throughout the celebration allows those gathered to bring their lives to the liturgy as well as taking the liturgy with them throughout the week in their lives.

The Church's traditional approach to religious education through creed, code, and cult has the unintentional effect of bifurcating faith and life. These foci are caught in the false dichotomy of secular:sacred; each with its own sphere of influence. A shift in concentration to Christ the king, covenant, and community bridges this distinction and allows faith and life to synthesize into abiding faith.

In turn, the abiding faith of its members invigorates and strengthens the Church. If the lives of believers are ones of faith in which no aspect of life is "a time or place where we have forgotten God,"⁵⁴ then the concerns of the Body of Christ and the concerns of the public sphere mesh. This is not to say that the solutions to these public concerns will always rest with the Magisterium. However, at least the voice of the Church, now relegated to the periphery of society, will again be a partner in the discussion. In effect, through education for abiding faith in the recovered Irish triad of Christ the king, covenant and community, the Church has the opportunity to regain its prophetic zeal and its relevance for the public square.

⁵⁴ Huebner, "Religious Education: Practicing the Presence of God (1987)," 392.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

My mother has what has commonly come to be called, a “Bucket List.” On it, there was the wish to go to Ireland. Her family emigrated from Ireland to the United States in the late nineteenth century, and while growing up she heard stories of life “back home.” For over seven decades, Ireland captured her imagination so, for her 77th birthday, I took her to see the land of the stories of her grandparents. I never imagined that this trip would become the inspiration for what has become my doctoral dissertation.

While Ireland today is, in many ways, drastically different from both the Ireland Mom’s family left behind and the Ireland of the focus of this work, what I encountered on that first trip left a very deep impression upon me. It seemed to me that, as was the case here in the United States, on an intellectual level, faith and life were becoming bifurcated, while on an affective one they were inseparable. This was true for both the people that I encountered and the landscape of the country. The Irish people carry out their lives alongside ancient Christian sites. Sixth century stone crosses are in fields with sheep, monastic ruins stand alongside schools, gravestones and church walls from the early Christian period dot the villages and towns. Reminders of the history of faith of the people of Ireland are everywhere. They stand as silent reminders to that shared past and, at the same time, as markers for present identity as people of faith.

When I returned home from this first trip, I began to read as much as I could about the Irish Church. Unfortunately, my first dip into the pool of Celtic Spirituality was through the doors of a mega chain bookseller with shelves lined with texts that promise to help uncover a secret Irish Celtic spirituality. However, reading these only confused me

because they did not align with the experiences that I had while in Ireland. Surely, I thought, if these texts were true, the Irish Church today would have to have some vestiges of this heterodox past; yet I found none in my subsequent travels to Ireland. At this time, my personal interest became an academic one and I turned to the scholarly arena for information.

Research on the early Irish Church generally falls into the areas of archaeology, art, or history. Very few scholars have undertaken the task of early Irish theology. The more I read, the more I wanted to learn about how a pagan island on the fringe of the known world not only converted to Christianity but became a leading Christian center in the early medieval period. Perhaps from this I could find something that would be beneficial to religious education at home in the States. The result of this pique of interest (and several more trips to Ireland to see the sites for myself as well as countless emails to scholars in Ireland and England) is this study.

The first task was to learn more about the context of pre-Christian Ireland. This was difficult because these indigenous people left no written records behind. From archaeology and the later Christian pseudo-historical texts, in chapter 1 I sketched, albeit in broad strokes, an image of early Irish society. The early Irish people were sophisticated in many ways evidenced by their metalwork, laws, and social structures. So then, Palladius, Patrick, and their contemporaries evangelized not to underdeveloped nation in the hinterlands but to an organized, structured, yet tribal, society.

My next task was to ascertain some understanding of the process of evangelization. Ireland converted by the word rather than by the sword. Drawing upon

the Patrician corpus and legal texts, in chapter 2 I was able to gain a lens into the catechesis of a people that resulted in the formation of a Christian nation. The evangelistic efforts of the early Irish wisely utilized the existing social structures and high regard for education as the *entré* for religious education. When the Christian faith came to Ireland it was an amenable, viable faith that did not simply supplant the indigenous religion, it rendered the pagan beliefs obsolete in view of the new way of life that accompanied it. The practice of educating fosterlings in the *túath*, transformed to religious education for the *manaig* (monastic family). The Irish societal values of honor, responsibility, relationality, and hospitality adapted nicely to life in the monastic towns. The growth of monasteries and development of monastic networks provided the infrastructure as this island of tribes became a united Christian nation.

At this point, there were no red flags of heresy waiving at me from out of the research. Perhaps, I thought, it would come in chapter 3 where I examined the content of the Irish Christian conversion. After all, the Irish used and preserved the works of two notable heretics, Pelagius and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Would I have the uncomfortable task of rehabilitating these theological villains for the sake of the project? My research proved that while Pelagius and Theodore were in fact authorities in the early Irish Church, they were *patres* among *patres*. The Irish did not rely on them to the exclusion of non-heretical writings. Neither, it appears, did they draw upon the anathematized evidence as they began to compose their own works. Because of this, I refer to Pelagius and Theodore as Acceptable Heretics.

It became time to survey the Irish texts to glean from them any wisdom that might be beneficial today. Through the writings of Patrick and, hagiographical, homiletical, and penitential texts three themes resounded often and with clarity: Christ the King, covenant, and community. These were the foci of the materials generated in Ireland, and I presume, therefore the heart of Christian faith understood the early Irish. Writing in the seventh century Cogitosus remarked that the miracles of Brigit were possible because of her abiding faith. The *Lorica* of Patrick presents an image of the believer embraced by Christ in all aspects of life. Texts connected with both of the premier Irish saints not only contain references to the triad of Irish themes, they situate them within lives where faith and life are inseparable; they are lives of abiding faith.

My next task was to take this recovered wisdom, the triad of foci that comprise abiding faith, and bring them into conversation with modern theology and religious education. Would they stand against critiques concerning, kyriarchy, partiality, and individualism? My partners in the dialogue of chapter 4 included voices from Catholic and Protestant theology, philosophy, sociology, the philosophy of education and scholars of religious education. While I did not have to rehabilitate the heretics of chapter 3, the concepts of Christ the King, covenant, and community carry added meanings that can destroy rather than build up faith. The conversation with the various voices transformed this triad of recovered Irish wisdom into what I propose is liberating, loving, and life-giving approach to faith and life.

Chapter 5 is the section where I demonstrated the possibilities for educating in abiding faith. The shared Christian praxis approach of Thomas Groome not only was

seemingly appropriate for the task, it dovetailed nicely with my goals. Shared Christian praxis is more than a method for the religious education classroom; it is an approach to learning that engages learners equally in the classroom, the sanctuary, and anywhere where conversations about faith emerge. I chose to offer suggestions for educating for abiding faith using shared Christian praxis in the formal education setting. Additionally I described the educative sense of the Catholic liturgy using examples from a thriving Wisconsin parish. My intention here was to suggest models for educating for abiding faith through the shared praxis approach.

The early Irish Christian experience offers wisdom for religious education today. The message of this recovery is not to turn to heresy, or to levy charges of suppression of an authentic non-Roman Christianity against the Catholic Church. The wisdom here is that in order for faith and life to come together in lived faith, there must be a point to it all. For the Irish this point was to abide in Christian faith at all times and in every activity. They recognized that Christ the King governed their lives in justice and love that they in turn were in a covenantal relationship with him and from this, they lived in right and loving relationships with one another. I term this abiding faith.

APPENDIX 1 THE LORICA OF ST. PATRICK¹

I rise today :
 in power's strength, invoking the Trinity
 believing in threeness
 confessing the oneness
 of Creation's Creator.

I rise today
 in the power of Christ's birth and baptism,
 in the power of his crucifixion and burial,
 in the power of his rising and ascending,
 in the power of his descending and judging.

I rise today
 in the power of the love of Cherubim
 in the obedience of angels
 and service of archangels,
 in hope of rising to receive the reward
 in the prayers of the Patriarchs
 in the predictions of the prophets,
 in the preaching of the Apostles,
 in the faith of the confessors,
 in the innocence of the holy virgins
 in the deeds of the righteous.

I rise today
 in Heaven's might
 in Suns' brightness,
 in Moon's radiance,
 in Fire's glory,
 in Lightning's quickness,
 in Wind's swiftness,
 in sea's depths,
 in Earth's stability,
 in Rock's fixity.

¹ "Lorica Patricii," in *Celtic Spirituality*, ed. Oliver Davies, *Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters* (New York: Paulist Press, 700), 118-120.

I rise today with the power of God to pilot me,
 God's strength to sustain me,
 God's eye to look ahead for me,
 God's ear to hear me,
 God's word to speak to me,
 God's hand to protect me,
 God's way before me,
 God's shield to defend me,
 God's host to deliver me,
 from snares of devils,
 from evil temptations,
 from nature's failings,
 from all who wish to harm me
 far or near,
 alone and in a crowd.

Around me I gather today all these powers:
 against every cruel and merciless force
 to attack my body and soul,
 against the charms of false prophets,
 the black laws of paganism,
 the false laws of heretics,
 the deception of idolatry,
 against spells cast by women, smiths, and druids,
 and all unlawful knowledge
 that harms the body and soul.

May Christ protect me today:
 against poison and burning,
 against drowning and wounding,
 so that I may have abundant reward:
 Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me;
 Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me;
 Christ to the right of me, Christ to the left of me;
 Christ in my lying, Christ in my sitting, Christ in my rising;
 Christ in the heart of all who think of me,
 Christ on the tongue of all who speak to me,
 Christ in the eye of all who see me,
 Christ in the ear of all who hear me.

I rise today in power's strength, invoking the Trinity,
believing in threeness,
confessing the oneness
of Creation's Creator.
For to the Lord belongs salvation,
and to the Lord belongs salvation,
and to Christ belongs salvation.
May your salvation Lord be with us always.

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